University of Alberta

Identification and Resolution of Issues Challenging Alberta School Superintendents

By

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Educational Administration and Leadership

Department of Educational Policy Studies

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 2002

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory to my father, Wallace Kenneth MacAskill.

Abstract

This study's purpose centered on the identification and resolution of contemporary issues challenging rural and suburban Alberta public school superintendents, within the context of educational reform.

Six Alberta school superintendents were purposefully selected to participate in this research. This study was qualitative in nature. The assumptions of the interpretative paradigm were adhered to for the purposes of the research. Data were gathered from interviews, site visits, and document analysis.

This study concluded that funding was a pervasive issue for Alberta School superintendents. Earmarked funding and per capita inequity have had a direct impact on the role of the Alberta school superintendents since the 1994-1995 school year. Attracting and retaining staff was noted as a significant issue. The challenge of maintaining a full staff, capable of providing an equitable high school education was noted. The concern for the provision of equitable education was noted as another significant issue. Costly teacher recruitment and retention strategies were short-term strategies that had significant funding implications.

Educational reforms affected superintendents in the following areas: role change, administrative concerns, role clarity, dual role tension, and stakeholder accountability. Resolution strategies were not perceived as synonymous with issue closure. Proposed

strategies to lobby government for increased funding or ease earmarked funding constraints were short-term solutions. These issues continued to challenge and frustrate the participants, with no imminent closure.

The importance of politics and power emerged, for the superintendents were encouraged to forge new relationships with an ever-growing array of stakeholders. The emphasis on the management role performed by current superintendents was evident. Time constraints and administrative tasks diminished their ability to act as instructional leaders. Recommendations for practice and theory included increased professional development with the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS), Alberta School Boards' Association (ASBA) and Alberta Learning to address issues such as role ambiguity and dual reporting tensions; graduate studies that included educational reform, financial management and politics; increased scope of research to include additional rural jurisdictions and senior administrators beyond the superintendency, and finally, future research regarding the cost benefits of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) funding.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my wife, Amy, for being a wonderful support throughout this educational journey. My two children, Meghan Ainslie and Hugh Wallace, continue to be an inspiration and have enabled me to maintain an appropriate perspective throughout the thesis writing. My sincere thanks to Hugh and Judy Smith and my mother, Catherine Morrison, who have made this doctoral experience a reality. Their unwavering support has made this journey thoroughly enjoyable.

My supervisor, Dr. Ken Ward, has been an inspirational mentor. His advice, patience and expertise have guided me throughout my doctoral studies. Drs. da Costa and Peters have provided valuable insight and direction during coursework, dissertation writing and collaborative research work. I am thankful to Drs. Larry Sackney, Larry Beauchamp and Mike Andrews for serving as committee members. My external examiner, Dr. Sackney, provided insightful commentary on the thesis. Dean Larry Beauchamp, provided challenging questions and valuable feedback during the thesis defence. Dr. Andrews provided guidance as a professor and committee chair.

I am thankful to the Department of Educational Policy Studies for providing the opportunity to act as a Graduate Teaching Assistant for the past two years. This opportunity has been a valuable learning experience, one that has informed my own teaching pedagogy. The aspiring teachers that I have taught in courses EDPS 310 and 410 provide hope in a bright future for public education.

The Halifax Regional School Board and The Nova Scotia Teachers' Union are to be commended for their educational funding for sabbatical leaves, which have helped offset the enormous cost of this endeavor.

The superintendents who acted as research participants for this study are to be commended for their patience and insight. The interview process, coupled with the site visits, have been a valuable professional and academic learning experience.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

The fundamental goal of schools to educate students has remained a constant truth for public education from its infancy. The task of accomplishing this ambitious goal becomes increasingly complex as reforms have changed the milieu for public education. In addition to reforms, Kochan (1999) found that the following societal factors have placed increased demands on public education: changes in society, including the breakdown of families; increased violence; and changing values.

In recent years, debate has increased concerning the overall quality of public education and demands for improvement. Critics complain about high drop-out rates, an unchallenging curriculum (Leo, 1998), and the poor performance by Canadian students on international tests (Young & Levin, 1998). Advocates of public education suggest that the critics have embellished the truth and that public education remains as successful as it has ever been (Barlow, 1995). Townsend (1998) identified the 1994 reforms that changed the Albertan educational landscape:

> Examples of local educational reforms implemented by the Alberta government in 1994 resulted in the amalgamation of school boards, centralization of taxation powers for the funding of public education, a 5% salary rollback for all teachers and administrators, downsizing of the Ministry of Education and the introduction, where it was not already in

> place, of a model of site-based management and decision-making for the schools. (p. 1)

Townsend (1998) stated that in the previous five years, Alberta Education had produced documentation that attempted to prove the positive correlation between reforms and improvement of schools. However, the reporting representative groups included parents and high school students, but not teachers, principals, and superintendents. Townsend's (1998) subsequent research discovered that a majority of superintendents, principals, and teachers did not agree that reforms had improved the system. The educational stakeholders had not reached consensus on the merits of educational reforms. In this context, Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) purported:

> Until recently, discussions on educational reform have given scant attention to the one area vital to educational improvement: the quality of school district leadership and governance--specifically, the effectiveness of the processes by which superintendents and school boards work together to establish good policies and carry them out. (p. iv)

The office of the superintendent has been viewed as key in increasing the effectiveness of the public educational system as a whole (Allison, 1989; Boich, Farquhar, & Leithwood, 1989) and, as such, provides crucial insight into the perceived effectiveness of educational reforms. Given the reality of societal change, I am interested in exploring the current challenges that superintendents endure during the era of educational reform.

Research Interest

As an aspiring senior administrator within public education, I am intrigued by the roles and responsibilities of the chief executive officer, commonly referred to as "the superintendent." For a school based administrator, the myriad of challenges that a typical school day present are a lived experience. The demand for vision, organization, and communication are paramount at this micropolitical level. I have a working knowledge of the unique relationship between the school and the school board; however, I lack insight into organizational management from a senior executive's perspective. Perhaps more importantly, I have not deeply contemplated and sought understanding of senior school board management until now.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the nature of the challenges affecting public school superintendents in Alberta. In order to increase current and aspiring superintendents' understanding of the superintendency, one of the study's primary goals was to elicit insights by exploring challenges faced by current CEOs. As well as identifying challenges, this study also tried to discover the strategies used to resolve them. Educational leadership is in the midst of constant change (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Millard, 1998; Senge, 1990) as current issues challenge superintendents. Situated within the context of educational reform, the present research concentrated on the identification and resolution of contemporary public educational issues challenging superintendents. CEOs need to anticipate and accept the reality of conflict as a natural characteristic of the schools and jurisdictions (MacMillan, 1994). Boich et al. (1989) have identified the

specific tensions for the Canadian superintendency as follows: centralization vs. decentralization, dual vs. unitary structure, public servant vs. corporate executive, professional educator vs. political manager, external regulation vs. self determination, and balance of power with teachers and trustees.

Centralization versus decentralization concerns the tensions surrounding authority over educational decision-making (Young & Levin, 1998). Boich et al. (1989) reported a trend toward decentralization in public education, which has direct implications for the size and management of school jurisdictions.

Dual versus unitary structure has similar tensions to those associated with centralization versus decentralization. Historically, a split has existed between the financial responsibilities of the secretary-treasurers and the educational responsibilities of the superintendent, which caused inherent tensions surrounding roles and responsibilities. This tension was partially clarified by the elevation of the status of the superintendent to chief executive officer, as occurred in Alberta, but this trend has not been uniformly implemented across Canada (Boich et al., 1989):

> For example, superintendents are chief executive officers in Ontario and all of the Atlantic provinces (although this has not been achieved without considerable struggle and debate and the Newfoundland legislation is permissive in this regard), but almost half of the school districts in British Columbia still retain the dual system of management.
>
> (Boich et al., 1989, p. 6)

With the role change of the superintendent from provincial civil servant to chief executive officer, the superintendent became more responsible for creating and

communicating a vision (Genge, 1991; Holdaway & Genge, 1995) rather than following orders (Boich et al., 1989).

With the increasing size and complexity of larger school boards, it has become more difficult for a superintendent to act as an instructional leader. With the advent of escalating demands for educational reforms, the superintendent is expected to be politically savvy and aware (Holdaway & Genge, 1995).

External regulation versus self-determination refers to the inconsistencies apparent across Canada with regard to superintendent qualifications. Provinces such as Ontario have specific criteria and qualifications expected of the superintendent, whereas, other provinces do not (Boich et al., 1989). An examination of the notices advertising current Canadian superintendent vacancies signifies the diversity of criteria identified as professional qualifications.

Relationships between the school trustees and teachers' unions have inherent power differentials and potential for tension. Boich et al. (1989) reported the trend for superintendents to have close working relationships with school trustees, partly because of their employee/employer relationship. Conflict is a natural aspect of the working relationships between teachers' unions and superintendents. Boich et al. (1989) found that "collectively, provincial teachers' and trustees' associations tend to be more powerful than provincial associations of school superintendents" (p. 10). Genge (1991) concluded that one of the main pressures on the profession was the need to separate the role of the board from the role of the superintendent. In addition to political tensions (Leithwood, 1995), relations with the school trustees were perceived as a major issue.

The role of the modern superintendent has typically been described as that of a politician (Leithwood, 1995). This role is a departure from the role of instructional leader heavily dependent on bureaucratic controls. The political tensions have evolved from a micro to macro level, as Leithwood (1995) suggested:

> The two faces of CEOs' politics include, first, the largely explicit politics of the school district's external environment and its legitimate demand to have its invariably diverse and often conflicting values reflected in the goals and plans for educational programs in the district. The second face includes the usually much subtler politics of the school district's internal environment and its power to insist that at least any plans to be realized in practice have to be doable within the framework of some very hard to change observational regularities and the need for considerable judgement to be exercised by those who actually do the teaching. (p. 319)

Typically, political tensions may have involved the CEO and the trustees; however, with increased demands for reform from the variety of educational stakeholders, the superintendent has been forced to embrace the public and government on a macro level.

Concerning the political role of modern-day superintendents, Kochan (1999) commented:

> Superintendents viewed the major change in their job as increased 'politicization' stating that they had had to become more political and more adept in 'people skills' when working both with the public and with their administrative staffs in order to succeed in their jobs. (p. 105)

I am interested in examining the effects of this increasingly political role on the modern superintendency.

Based on my field placement experience with superintendents and attendance at College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) meetings, I anticipated issues in the following areas: contract negotiations, facility management, special needs, inadequate government funding, and political issues.

Definitions

Within the context of this study, the concepts of "superintendent", "chief executive officer", "suburban district" and "rural district" have been operationally defined. Where possible, official school board and Alberta Teachers' Association definitions have been used.

Superintendent

"Superintendents are employed by the school board as approved by the minister of education and serve as chief executive officers of the school board and the school jurisdiction" (*Teaching in Alberta*, 2000, p. 53).

Chief Executive Officer

The acronym "CEO" will be used interchangeably with the term "superintendent" to refer to the Chief Executive Officer.

Suburban Jurisdictions

This term will be used in reference to the smaller school jurisdictions adjacent to larger urban school districts.

Rural Jurisdictions

This term will be used in reference to the school districts located in rural communities of Alberta. These school jurisdictions are located outside the boundaries of urban centers. They typically encompass vast geographic expanses with few schools compared to the number of schools in urban jurisdictions.

Assumptions

Two basic assumptions are to be stated from the outset of this research. One, it was assumed that current issues troubling superintendents would become apparent under broad emergent themes from the process of interviewing. Two, it was also assumed that the interpretive paradigm, with its ontological and epistemological assumptions would form the philosophical and methodological base from which this research would be conducted.

Limitations

Data in this study were collected from interviews conducted with public school superintendents. These data were interpreted by me and, as such, have been subjectively interpreted. While every measure has been taken to preserve the integrity of these data, the interviewer and interviewee have ultimately co-created meaning. I also assume that as a researcher, I was not able to discover ultimate truths, but rather co-create meaning during a given time. This meaning may be subject to change as conditions and pressures change in the educational milieu. Transferability of the conclusions to other

superintendents, to other school jurisdictions, or to other time periods is made with caution.

Delimitations

This study was confined to investigating current issues challenging public school superintendents. The six participants in this study were superintendents chosen because of their interest in discussing these current issues, ease of accessibility and willingness to participate. Participants consisted of superintendents responsible for rural and suburban school jurisdictions. The purpose of this focus was to identify the concerns of the CEOs of rural and suburban jurisdictions, assuming that the concerns of larger urban school jurisdictions were different. The participants were at a variety of different career stages ranging from a participant concluding his first year of service to a participant ending a two decade tenure as a senior administrator.

Research Question

The research was guided by the following question: What are the current issues facing Alberta school superintendents, and what strategies are being used to resolve these issues? The following sub-questions emerged from the literature review, CASS meetings and my superintendent field placement. These sub-questions were designed to achieve the purpose of the research.

The following sub-questions were addressed in the research:

1. How has provincial funding affected the quality of Alberta education?

2. What strategies are used to maintain effective working relationships with the school board and other educational stakeholders?
3. Has the role of the superintendent been defined clearly enough so that all educational stakeholders have a sense of the CEO's responsibilities?
4. What jurisdictional concerns, if any, have arisen since the educational reforms of the 1990s?
5. What role does employee delegation play in the management of a school jurisdiction?
6. Is the superintendent viewed as a "chief executive officer" or a "chief academic officer?"
7. What are the future challenges facing the superintendency?

Significance of the Study

The public school superintendent in Canada has a major role in educational leadership that has endured significant change since its inception (Boich et al., 1989). Superintendents occupy a unique and integral position in the formal organization of school systems. As chief executive officers, some manage multi-million dollar budgets, administer large numbers of employees, and are in a position to substantially influence the effectiveness of their systems; others manage much smaller systems with different assigned roles and responsibilities (Genge, 1991).

Although much research has studied leadership in general (Fullan, 1994; Hanson, 1996; Leithwood, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1992), scholars, writers and those responsible for professional preparation have largely neglected the superintendent's role (Boich, et al.,

1989; Crowson & Morris, 1990). Leithwood and Musella (1991) stated that the lack of attention to the superintendency until recently was dismaying. Murphy and Hallinger (1986) and Crowson (1987) have indicated that little is known about the basic questions regarding CEO practices. Cooper, Fusarelli and Carella (2000) questioned the perceptions concerning CEOs:

> Is the school superintendency still an attractive, workable profession for educators dedicated to school reform? The popular perception of the superintendency is that of an impossible job that few want to undertake and in which even the best and the brightest confront escalating and competing demands, find themselves besieged by confusing and conflicting interest groups, and enjoy little or no job security. But for all the speculation and concern about the position, superintendents themselves are rarely asked what they think about the position, career crises, job mobility, role satisfaction, and future life plans. (p. 3)

A superintendent interviewed in a research project delving into the problems of the British Columbia School superintendents in 1987 stated, "Sometimes it's like putting out one foot in the dark-you just hope there's solid ground for somewhere ahead" (Storey, 1992, p. 41). The superintendency is embedded with challenges and uncertainties; however, Bjork and Brunner (2000) have reported the following optimistic findings:

> The 2000 American Association of School Administrators (AASA) ten-year study of the American School Superintendent is not one full of gloom and doom. Superintendents across the nation, in districts of all sizes and types, report the superintendency to be a viable and rewarding career in

> public service. They do indicate that a number of problems and troubles exist, but not so many as to seriously impair the educational process in their districts. The overall picture of American school governance the superintendents perceive is one in which superintendents and board members work together to improve the nation's schools. (p. iii)

My research is justified by the demand for increased research into the superintendency (Boich et al., 1989; Cooper, Fusarelli & Carella, 2000; Leithwood & Musella, 1991) and the reporting of problems and troubles in the office of the CEO (Glass, Bjork & Brunner, 2000). Ingram and Miklos (1977) commented on the findings of the Inter Agency Task Force research commissioned to examine the future of the Alberta school superintendency:

> The role of the superintendent is in a state of emergence, characterized by ambiguities and conflicting expectations. Areas identified as in need of attention by the study included status, role relationships, selection, contracts and professional development. (p. 1)

In addition, a decade has passed since comprehensive research has been performed on the superintendency within an Alberta context (*Superintendents' Issues Survey Report,* 1990). A secondary justification for this present study is to provide insights for aspiring superintendents into the working realities of chief executive officers. The findings may provide professional development implications for aspiring leaders and may result in recommendations for graduate preparation programs. The results will be of particular interest to current and aspiring superintendents, school board trustees, and educational stakeholders in general.

References to American literature and research have been considered relevant because of the similarities between the Canadian and American educational systems.

Summary

This first chapter introduced the purpose of the study. Research interests, the research question/sub-questions, definitions, assumptions, limitations and the delimitations were provided. This study was deemed to be significant because despite the major role of superintendents in public education, insufficient research on their role has been performed (Boich et al., 1989; Crowson & Morris, 1990). The research was justified by the demand for increased research into the superintendency (Boich et al., 1989; Cooper, Fusarelli & Carella, 2000; Leithwood & Musella, 1991) and the reporting of existing problems in the office of the CEO (Glass, Bjork & Brunner, 2000). In addition, more than a decade has passed by since comprehensive research on superintendents' issues in an Alberta context has been pursued.

Chapter Two contains a literature review under the following headings: Recent History of the Canadian Superintendency, Role of the Alberta Superintendent, Review of Previous Superintendent Research, Current Issues, Educational Reform, Small Rural Schools, Future of the Superintendency. These topics facilitated the creation of the proposed conceptual framework for this study.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature is organized into following topics, which assisted in the creation of the conceptual framework for the study (see Figure 1, p. 36):

- Recent History of the Canadian Superintendency
- Role of the Alberta Superintendent
- Review of Previous Superintendent Research
- Current Issues
- Educational Reform
- Small Rural Schools
- Future of the Superintendency

The chapter concludes with an overview of the literature and an explanation of the conceptual framework.

Recent History of the Canadian Superintendency

The term "superintendent" evolved during the management movement led by Frederick Taylor. The first American school superintendents tried to ensure that their schools operated similarly to the industrial model (Spillane & Regnier, 1998). Egerton Ryerson became the first Chief Superintendent of Schools for Upper Canada in 1846 and in the same year, drafted the Common School Act, the first of a series of Acts culminating in 1871 with the attainment of universal publicly financed education and bringing about some fundamental changes in the relation of local to central school governance (Bryce, 1979).

School consolidation and the development of larger units of administration and larger consolidated school boards on the prairies characterized the decades of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. In rural Alberta, the larger school divisions established under the Social Credit Government gradually gave way to the county system in the 1960s, which had coterminous boundaries for all local and municipal services including education (Boich, et al., 1989).

Prior to the passage of the School Act of 1970, most Alberta school superintendents had been employees of the provincial government. Exceptions to this pattern occurred in the larger urban jurisdictions, which had long employed their own superintendents (Pettigrew, 2000). Miklos and Ingram (1977) revealed the ambiguities associated with the dual versus unitary control of schools in Alberta:

> Unitary control of structure, in which the superintendent is the chief executive officer, has been slow to develop in Canada. Until the late 1960s it was adopted primarily by city school systems and used in special cases such as the administration of armed services schools. Prior to 1970 the Government of Alberta appointed superintendents to rural jurisdictions to exercise whatever regulatory functions were necessary as well as provide educational advice and leadership. Because of this tradition and because prior to 1970 most educational decisions were made at the provincial level, the secretary-treasurer became, in fact, the chief official responsible to the board. The superintendent was viewed as the provincial inspector and an educational advisor--thus the practice of a dual control developed. (p. 24)

The Schools Act of 1970 mandated that every local authority, large or small, separate or public, county division or district employs its own superintendent (Downey, 1976). The Schools Act of 1970 did not elevate the position to that of chief executive officer because of the structure of the county system of governance in the rural areas (Boich et al., 1989).

The status change from provincial to local appointment was not a seamless transition, and as a result, by 1975 a sense of anxiety had developed within the ranks of the Alberta superintendency. The Alberta Department of Education commissioned the Downey Report in response to concerns created by the new role and position of the superintendent (Downey, 1976).

From the Downey Report in 1976 until 1984, regulation and practice clarified the position of the Alberta School superintendent (Speidelsbach, 1988). The Schools Act of 1988 reaffirmed the position of superintendent of schools as the chief executive officer of the board (Pettigrew, 2000). The ambiguity of the dual versus unitary form of control for the superintendent was an historic concern. For example, Collins (1954) stated, "superintendents of schools in Alberta and Saskatchewan are concerned about the relative amount of authority which they exercise in comparison with that of the board of trustees and the secretary of the larger unit" (p. 262).

Role of the Alberta School Superintendent

The role of the Alberta school superintendent is evolving. Speidelsbach (1988) described the Alberta school superintendent as crucial to the establishment and maintenance of an effective school system. As the chief executive officer in an Alberta

jurisdiction, the superintendent is responsible for administering the school system effectively and efficiently and for providing leadership in the implementation of changes, in order to provide a first rate education for Alberta students (Speidelsbach, 1988). Doyle (1998) summarized the transition of the industrial to modern-day superintendent:

> Until recently the superintendent like his industrial counterpart was the autocrat in chief. His responsibility (and it typically was 'his') was structurally similar to the captains of industry on whose jobs the superintendency was modeled. Comfortably situated at the command center, the superintendent reined supreme over all he surveyed. His dominion was the district and its employees. … That picture is fast fading, going if not yet fully gone, but certainly not forgotten. Successful organizations are no longer characterized by a command-control structure because they did not work. Successful organizations recognize that their greatest asset is employee creativity and problem solving capacity. (p. 15)

Spillane and Regnier (1998) posited that in addition to the responsibilities of chief executive officer, the superintendent should hold the title of CAO: chief academic officer. This title involves the CEO in an arduous struggle as competition for his or her attention and time can be fierce because of the myriad of educational stakeholders and interest groups (Duignan, 1979). Moreover, the effectiveness of CEOs is directly proportional to their ability to articulate a vision, clearly communicate, effectively prioritize, and balance competing interests (Leithwood, 1995; Leithwood & Musella, 1991; Spillane & Regnier, 1998). Allison (1989) found that a school system's size, geography and, diversity had an impact on the role of superintendents and their interactions with the jurisdiction.

According to the amendments of the Alberta Schools Act of July 1994, the official role of the superintendent is as follows:

> The office of superintendent provides the linkage between provincial and local school board education goals, objectives, strategies and expected outcomes.
>
> The Alberta School Act recognizes that school superintendents have local and provincial duties. Section 94 of the School Act sets out specific requirements for superintendents.
>
> While a superintendent is selected and appointed by the board, the Minister's prior approval is required in writing before the appointment or reappointment comes into effect.
>
> The superintendent shall supervise the operation of schools and the provision of education programs in the district or division, including but not limited to the following:
>
> (a) implementing education policies established by the Minister;
>
> (b) ensuring that students have the opportunity in the district or division to meet the standards of education set by the Minister;
>
> (c) ensuring that the fiscal management of the district or division by the treasurer or secretary-treasurer is in accordance with the terms or conditions of any funding received by the board under this Act or any other Act;
>
> (d) providing leadership in all matters relating to education in the district or division.

> The superintendent shall report to the Minister with respect to the matters referred to in subsection (4)(a) to (d) at least once a year as required by the Minister.
>
> (*Restructuring Education*, 1994, section 94)

The official job description of the CEO has changed since the Alberta Schools Act of 1970. The confusion about the superintendent's status being elevated to the rank of Chief Executive Officer has been clarified in the most current legislation. However, the above job description remained purposefully vague. Section (d) of the roles and responsibilities illustrated the broad and extensive nature of the definition. Cooper, Fusarelli and Carella (2000) concurred with suggestions for the reorganization of the superintendency to provide more support, clearer expectations and increased salary. T. C. Byrne (1961), former Alberta Chief Superintendent of Schools, argued for the need for role clarity within the superintendency:

> Confusion exists as to the services a superintendent should render his board. To seek parallels in industry, is his position comparable to that of president of a company, its general manager, or its chief consulting engineer? Does he exercise authority over all or only some aspects of school administration? Does this authority reside in the office itself or is it delegated by the board? Does the superintendent share in policy development or is his role limited to the execution of policy set by the governing body? (as cited in *Superintendent of Schools*, 1984, p. 9)

Review of Superintendency Research

I examined the previous research conducted in this area to establish a rationale and context for my study. This review focused predominantly on Alberta research of the superintendency, as this research was most applicable to this dissertation.

Downey (1976) described the role of the Alberta superintendent as in a state of emergence characterized by ambiguities and conflicting role expectations.

Duignan (1979) studied the daily lives of Alberta superintendents and concluded their working lives were characterized by an involvement in many activities, each of short duration. Duignan further concluded that the numerous daily tasks were often unrelated and that one of the main pressures of the superintendent's job was organization and time management. Duignan discovered that an open-door policy created many impromptu meetings with colleagues who made exhausting time demands. Finally, he reported that superintendents were often immersed in conflict mediation, which demanded an awareness of the political forces surrounding them and the use of political savvy.

Green (1988) investigated the role of school superintendents in Alberta with respect to relationships, selected tasks, skills and personal characteristics. His findings affirmed the importance of superintendent/trustee relations. In order of importance, the following tasks were identified: policy development; evaluation; working with trustees; public relations; managing staff; business management; and monitoring school programs, school facilities, student services, and bus transportation. Specifically, the three most important superintendent skills were identified as decision-making, delegation and empathy.

Genge (1991) examined how effective superintendents administered their school systems in Alberta. Genge discovered that effective superintendents had a clear vision for their school systems. In addition, effective superintendents were found to be facilitative, consultative, team members, communicative, and interested in the curriculum and instructional programming. One of the main pressures on the position was the need to separate the role of the school board from that of the superintendent. Genge found that superintendents were continually under pressure because of excessive workloads.

Wendel (1994) examined the nature of Alberta superintendent values and how these influenced problem-solving and decision-making ability. Wendel found that CEOs possessed a highly developed sense of integrity, which strongly influenced their practice. Superintendents were seen as consultative and uncompromising in their fundamental beliefs. Wendel found that CEOs expressed the importance of a mission and vision. Finally, he found that CEOs stressed the importance of maintaining the dignity of others despite potential negative ramifications.

Murphy (1994) examined the perceptions of school superintendents, assistant superintendents, board chairpersons, and Department of Education personnel concerning the role, effectiveness, and sources of influence and job satisfaction of school superintendents in Nova Scotia. The findings indicated that superintendents were responsive to a diversity of expectations, considered themselves effective and influential, and were generally satisfied with their jobs. Superintendents rated qualified staff, trust, and community support as important for their overall effectiveness. Obstacles to effectiveness included the political nature of the board, lack of funding, and lack of on-going professional development. Superintendents identified their recognition of others,

delegation of authority, and standard of performance as among the most important sources of influence.

McMillan (1994) studied how Alberta superintendents experience and manage conflict. He asserted that superintendents employed a humanistic approach when doing so. He found that superintendents used teambuilding techniques and communication skills. CEOs valued adaptability, dignity and self-worth and preserved them throughout the conflict cycle.

Streifling (1995) examined the changing role of the Newfoundland superintendent. He reported that widely varied pressures and responsibilities characterized the role. Board relations, delegation, and teamwork were considered important. Accountability to the variety of educational stakeholders was considered imperative as well. Changing social and economic conditions were reported to be the most significant forces producing role changes.

Pettigrew (2000) described the working life of an Alberta school superintendent. Roles for the superintendents were identified as follows: information gatherer, information disseminator, defender, decision-maker, negotiator, spokesperson, cheerleader, and flagbearer. Work life was characterized as a constant struggle between personal values and beliefs and life and work obligations.

Cooper, Fusarelli and Carella's (2000) research on the American superintendency reported the potential for future crises given the imminent change in leadership demographics. Cooper et al. (2000) recommended that the position of CEO be strengthened through restructuring to include more support, better pay, benefits, pension opportunities, rewards, and recognition.

Glass, Bjork and Brunner (2000) reported the findings of a ten-year study for the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and concluded that the majority of superintendents, regardless of the size of their jurisdictions, reported their position to be a viable and rewarding career. One of the main findings concerned the importance of positive superintendent and school board relationships. These findings reaffirmed the research results of Goodman and Zimmerman (2000), who described the importance of positive superintendent and school board relations.

The common emergent themes gleaned from a review of relevant literature and research were as follows. The first theme concerned the political nature of the modern superintendent. Leithwood (1995) stated that the modern superintendency has become a political position and, furthermore, that the superintendent should not be primarily concerned with instructional leadership:

> Why? Because when, organizationally, you are removed from the classrooms as superintendents are, the functions evoked by the instructional leadership are necessarily carried out more effectively by others; the chances that the superintendent of a moderate size district will directly influence the instructional experiences of students is about the same as the alchemist's chances of producing gold from lead. (p. 2)

Spillane and Regnier (1998) acknowledged the importance of politics in the modern-day superintendency and espoused the need for instructional leadership. In addition to the political theme, the importance of positive relationships between the superintendent and the school board trustees was noted (Genge, 1991; Glass et al., 2000; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Green, 1988; Murphy, 1994; Streifling, 1995).

The second emergent theme was clarification of the role of superintendent. Tensions resulting from unclear definitions and parameters of roles and responsibilities for superintendents were noted (Duignan, 1976; Genge, 1991; Pettigrew, 2000).

The third emergent theme concerned the importance of visioning. Effective CEOs were reported as capable of clearly articulating a vision and considered communication of these visions a priority (Genge, 1991; Wendel, 1994).

The fourth emergent theme concerned the ability to manage conflict and the prevalence of conflict management as a primary role for the CEO (Duignan, 1979; McMillan, 1994; Pettigrew, 2000; Wendel, 1994).

The fifth and final emergent theme concerned the increased demands on the superintendent and the necessity to be able to effectively delegate important tasks to subordinates (Duignan, 1979; Genge, 1991; Green, 1988; Murphy, 1994; Streifling, 1995).

Current Issues

Boich et al. (1989) identified the following potential CEO issues: centralization vs. decentralization, dual vs. unitary structure, public servant vs. corporate executive, professional educator vs. political manager, external regulation vs. self-determination, and balance of power with teachers and trustees. I anticipated concerns in the following areas: contract negotiations, facility management, special needs issues, inadequate government funding, and political issues. In this context Spillane and Regnier (1998) stated

> While it is clear that the main thing that a superintendent should be focusing on is the improvement of academic learning, there are tremendous pressures to spend his or her time on other issues, and, indeed, often superintendents focus on practically everything but the main thing. These issues usually fall into the following groups: special education and English as a second language, alternate forms of schooling and associated administration and finally use of facilities by outside organizations. (p. 31)

A variety of potential problems was discussed in the Alberta School Trustees Association's report entitled *Superintendent of School Alberta Issues/Canadian Legislation* (1984): the importance of the superintendent and school board being able to resolve their inherent differences and foster a trusting relationship, the need for school boards to define and periodically review, the expectations it holds for the superintendent of schools, the need to have authority well defined, the need for school boards and superintendents to address interpersonal conflicts as they arise and realize that conflict is inevitable and finally the need for well conceived and implemented performance appraisal and equity of compensation (pp. 7-23).

A subsequent superintendents' issues survey report in 1990 entitled *Superintendents' Issues Survey Report* conducted by the Policy and Evaluation Branch of Alberta Education reported the following pressing issues:

> teacher shortages (especially in rural and remote areas in some specialty subjects (i.e., math, French, science and music), aging school facilities and resources and the potential hazard they pose for students, as well as

> inadequate school facilities and resources, the increasing numbers of special needs students, especially those with behavior problems, the rapid pace of curriculum changes and effects on school systems and finally fiscal equity. (p. 3)

The two most frequently mentioned issues demanding immediate action were:

- fiscal equity (how to equalize school board funding throughout the province)
- the appalling state of some of the school buildings because of aging. (p. 3)

Potential solutions suggested to address these critical issues included:

- Provide inservice grants and other job incentives to attract teachers to remote areas
- Introduce job sharing between and amongst school jurisdictions
- Alternate teacher education programs to ease teachers shortages in certain specialties
- Increase provincial funding for modernization and/or replacing old and aging school buildings
- Coordinate services by other government departments (i.e., Health, Family, and Social Services) to address needs of special education students
- Increase Regional Offices of Education (ROEs) services to assist jurisdictions to implement the rapid changes in the curriculum and to address other program and curriculum changes. (p. 3)

Educational Reform

Educational reform will be used as a metaphorical lens to analyze the changes in the role of the Alberta school superintendent. Educational reform has had a major impact

on the educational landscape of Alberta during the 1990s, but is not a new concept in Canadian education. Lauzon and Leahy (2000) reported that "educational reform in a Canadian context has been characterized by a continual process of reform and consolidation since its inception as a public service" (p. 1). Lauzon and Leahy (2000) further characterized educational reform as synonymous with amalgamation resulting in larger school and boards. Gallagher (1995) described the rationale for educational reform:

> Recently we have once again embarked on another round of reform and consolidation of education in Canada. In a time of increased need for economic efficiency in order to combat provincial deficits, Canadian provinces have turned to the idea that by increasing the size of administrative units within education, a savings can be created while at the same time providing an education of greater quality.
> (as cited in Lauzon & Leahy, 2000, p. 2)

Mazurek (1999) linked the genesis of educational reform partly to the Hardy Report published in 1977 which "identified a general public dissatisfaction with the high cost of public education with only mediocre results" (as cited in Harrison & Kachur, 1999, p. 14). The restructuring that occurred between 1993 and 1996 had broad ramifications for educational stakeholders. Mazurek (1999) identified five government policies that radically changed the educational structure during this time:

1. *Measuring Up* involved government policy describing new goals for government departments as well as delineating specific implementation and evaluation criteria.

2. *Meeting the Challenges* specified how Alberta Learning was to meet the above criteria.
3. *Roles and Responsibilities in Education* identified new educational responsibilities for the following stakeholder groups: students, parents, school councils, school boards, superintendents, principals, teachers, staff, communities, and Alberta Education.
4. *The Teacher Education Policy Reform* specifically addressed the Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSAs) that teachers were responsible for knowing.
5. *Accountability in Education* specified school and school board reporting and monitoring responsibilities.

(as cited in Kachur & Harrison, 1999, p. 16)

Mazurek (1999) reported the specific changes to Alberta education from 1994 to 1997 as follows:

> For 1994/95, these proposals included legislation to restructure education; provincial requisition and distribution of educational property taxes; and reduction of school board spending on administration and capital.
>
> For 1995/95, these proposed changes included getting charter schools piloted; teacher certification requirements updated; the number of school boards reduced; Alberta Education reorganized; downsizing and cost recovery of department services increased; provincial assessment

> programs expanded; school jurisdiction business plans required; and a new provincial funding framework created.
>
> For 1996/97, the proposed changes included having Career and Technology Studies implemented; local attendance boundaries removed; competencies for beginning and experienced teachers established; site-based management implemented; uniform provincial mill rates; and an overall budget-reduction target of over a quarter of a billion dollars. (as cited in Kachur & Harrison, 1999, p. 16)

The funding framework was a major departure from past practice and removed local taxing authority, instead routing property-tax funds for education through the provincial government to achieve funding equity to all jurisdictions regardless of local tax-base wealth (van Tamelen, 1999). Moreover, important constraints, which were relevant to school administration in general and to superintendents in particular, were imposed on funding for school jurisdictions.

> The funding block for system administration is limited to 5% of the total funding allocation and no transfer of additional funds to this function is allowed. This constrains central administrative line positions to a small number of people who have a broad span of supervisory responsibilities. Second, the funds a jurisdiction can allocate for centrally provided instructional support are capped at 1.4%, 0.5% and 0.8% of the instruction and administrative blocks over a three year period. This constrains the

> staff positions and resources available at the system level to support principals at the school level. (van Tamelen, 1999, p. 4)

Many changes have obviously occurred in Alberta public education since the era of educational reforms and will have had an impact on the administrative role of the superintendency within Alberta.

Small Rural Schools

School closures and amalgamation of school jurisdictions are realities within public education. Even though rural and urban jurisdictions have been affected by wholesale consolidation practices, the rural communities suffer a more harmful fate than their urban neighbors. Miller (1995) identified this phenomenon:

> Many rural communities now face a decline in their quality of life due to the 1980s economic downturn and the 1990s globalization of the marketplace. Businesses have closed and many young well-educated citizens have left for urban areas. Additionally, social services, including schools, have been regionalized or consolidated as cost cutting measures. These have led to high levels of unemployment and the deterioration of rural economic, social, and environmental well being. (as cited in Lauzon & Leahy, 2000, p. 2)

Given the recent demands for increased accountability, government programs and services arguably require closer examination and reforms, but for rural jurisdictions and schools, reformers often use urban models for implementation. Lauzon and Leahy (2000)

advocated for reforms that acknowledge the differences between rural and urban school jurisdictions:

> We need to challenge the every assumption upon which public education has been built and the relationship of school to community. If rural communities are to not only survive, but thrive, then educational solutions must acknowledge and account for the necessary relationship between rural community and their schools. (p. 12)

In an extensive report presented to the Alberta School Boards' Association in December 2001, Wiebe presented policy considerations to maintain equity within small Alberta rural schools. Wiebe (2001) reported the following concerns and recommendations for government policy:

> Demographics: Government policy should recognize that small rural schools are an important component of the social infrastructure required to
>
> 1. achieve economic diversification,
> 2. spur growth in Alberta's agricultural industry, and
> 3. improve the quality of life in rural Alberta.
>
> Education Programs: The sparsity formula allocated funding disproportionately to the small schools and did not consider their varying sizes and grade organization. A review of the distance and sparsity funding formula is essential.

Student Transportation requires enhancements to

1. enable students in small rural schools to access specialized programs in neighboring schools without being restricted to courses requiring special facilities or equipment, and
2. ensure that funding is not reduced for jurisdictions with declining bus populations but fixed transportation costs.

School facilities: a more equitable government policy on facilities for small rural schools would

1. decrease the importance of facility utilization and student enrollments in making funding decisions, and
2. allocate funding for plant operations and the Building Quality Restoration Program on real costs instead of emphasizing student enrollments.

School consolidation:

Enhancements to the government's policy on school consolidation would

1. tie closure procedures together with consolidation studies conducted in the jurisdictions, and
2. include guidelines that specifying when school consolidation has reached an endpoint. (pp. 6-7)

Wiebe's (2001) recommendations indicate the differences between rural and urban school jurisdictions that affect the administrative duties of a superintendent.

Future of the Superintendency

The future of the superintendency is uncertain. Spillane and Regnier (1998) concurred but made some fundamental suggestions to prepare superintendents for the future:

> Make sure that you have a good, solid traditional education and the ability to think thoroughly and quickly about complex issues so that whatever comes up you understand at least where it came from. There is no substitute for this. Stay on the edge, stay current in everything--not just with the education journals and books but read broadly. (p. 12)

Boich et al. (1989) suggested four broad social trends potentially impacting on the superintendency: the information based-society, the aging population, increased cultural diversity, and equal rights:

> Superintendents will have to possess a robust philosophy of education, one which encompasses the legitimate range of goals aspired to by the school system's clients. Superintendents will have to work with a broader range of groups each with their own special interest. This will place pressure on the superintendent's ability to negotiate common ground, define boundaries of the system's responsibility and help staff to acquire the same abilities. (p. 172)

Leithwood (1995) reported that "CEOs should take responsibility for continuous efforts to establish, review, and clarify the central directions to be taken by the district organization, in collaboration with the entire community of legitimate stakeholders" (p. 336). Speidelsbach (1988) posited that "as people and situations change, so the role

of the superintendent will evolve. Superintendents of the future will still have to be skilled at decision-making, and will still have to be trustworthy, dependable and ethical in their behavior" (p. 6). "The superintendent of the future will require many of the same skills, but there will be a new emphasis on human relations" (p. 4). Konnert and Augenstein (1990) provided the following recommendations for the future superintendent:

> If superintendents are to provide leadership for schools in this new age, there are five key areas which must receive introspection and analysis. These are: visionary leadership and motivation, educational process and content, organizational restructuring and role redefinition, quality of worklife, and effective use of technology. (p. 28)

Jackson (1995) reported that future superintendents should have

> a broader perspective on society and its network of interdependence. CEOs need to have a heightened awareness and more extensive knowledge of the programs and services provided by various community service agencies. CEOs finally need to be able to analyze power structures and dynamics. (p. 62)

Summary

The literature reveals that the role of the superintendency is evolving. Historically, the Alberta school superintendent has made the shift from public servant to Chief Executive Officer. This change in responsibilities has caused confusion. From the Downey Report in 1976 until 1984, the position of the Alberta school superintendent was

gradually clarified by regulation and practice, but expectations and responsibilities remain ambiguous.

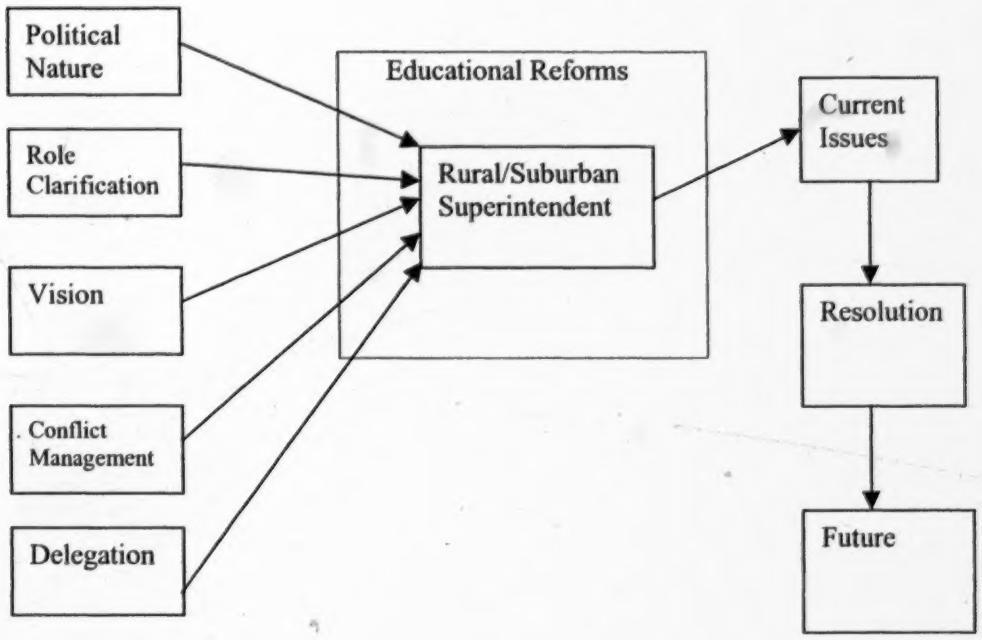
The Alberta government's educational reforms between 1994 and 1997 have resulted in major changes in the educational landscape. These reforms included amalgamation of school boards, centralization of taxation powers for the funding of public education, salary rollback for all teachers and administrators, downsizing of the Ministry of Education, and site-based management and decision-making for the schools. These reforms have created tensions and issues for current superintendents to resolve that differ from the previous challenges.

A review of recent research on the superintendent gleaned five emergent themes: the political nature of the CEO, the need for clarification of the role of superintendent, the importance of visioning and effective communication, the necessity of effective conflict-management skills, and the need for effective delegation skills.

In light of the evolving nature of the superintendency within the recent educational reform milieu and the dearth of recent research on the Alberta superintendency, an investigation of the current issues facing Alberta school superintendents is necessary. The review of literature guided the creation of the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework: Issues and Resolutions for Alberta School Superintendents



Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1 represents the direction for the study as was determined by the literature review. The five themes in Figure 1- political nature, role clarification, vision, conflict management, and delegation-emerged as issues from the literature that historically affected the role of the superintendent prior to the educational reforms of the 1990s in Alberta. This study has three goals: (1) to identify the current issues facing superintendents, (2) to identify their resolution strategies in the era of educational reform, and (3) predict future trends in their role. Current issues, resolutions and future trends are therefore depicted in Figure 1 in addition to the themes that emerged from the literature review.

The next chapter details the methodology of the study. The chapter is organized under the following headings: Interpretivist Paradigm, Personal Ontology and Epistemology, Research Design, Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation, Methodology, Trustworthiness Criteria, Ethics and Protection of Participants, Research Timeline, Initial Interview Process and Conclusion

Chapter 3

Research Method and Design

This study was qualitative in nature. The choice of qualitative methods was made to elicit insights into the working realities of current CEOs. I wanted to understand the importance of the everyday lived experience of superintendents, assuming that reality is socially constructed, complex and ever-changing. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) revealed that

> Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape the inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. (p. 8)

Interpretivist Paradigm

The assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm were adhered to for the purposes of the research. Glesne (1999) identified these assumptions:

> [which asserted] a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and ever changing. To understand the nature of constructed realities, qualitative researchers interact and talk to their participants about their perceptions. The researcher seeks out the variety of perspectives; they do not try to reduce the multiple interpretations to a norm. (p. 5)

The literature review revealed that the superintendent's world is complex and ever-changing. With the increased pace of changes and role ambiguity, it is necessary to delve into the current issues challenging CEOs. The interpretivist assumes that reality is socially constructed, so an interview design will reveal the rich insights into these current superintendent issues. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated:

> all research is interpretative; it is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be undertaken and studied. Some beliefs may be taken for granted, invisible, only assumed, whereas others are highly problematic and controversial. (p. 19)

Prior to embarking on this study I assumed that the current issues were, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated "highly problematic" and "controversial"; nevertheless, an account of these issues is necessary and timely.

Lincoln and Guba (1994) defined "paradigms" as basic belief systems based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions:

> A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimate truths or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines for its holder, the nature of the world, the individual's place in it and the range of possible relationships to the world and its parts. (p. 107)

Personal Ontology and Epistemology

Lincoln and Guba (1994) defined the "ontological question" as follows:

> 'What is the form and the nature of reality' and therefore, 'what is there that can be known about it?' For example, if a 'real world' is assumed,

> then what can be known about it is 'how things really are' and 'how things really work.' (p. 108)

Glesne (1999) further stated that "the ontological belief for interpretivists, therefore, is that social realities are constructed by the participants in those social settings" (p. 5). Therefore, I listened for participants' different understandings and values, and interacted with and discussed with superintendents their perceptions about current challenging issues.

The epistemological question asks "what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would be knower and what can be known?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1994, p. 108). Hence, I recognized that the questions posed elicited certain responses. I considered my role during the study. The superintendents might have considered me an "outsider" and responded with rehearsed answers, so that the data collected may have not provided the kind of rich insights that were sought. However, by coupling interviews with site visits, the accurate and insightful worldviews of the superintendents were obtained. Since the participants have had to cope with similar common experiences, their shared experiences addressed the epistemological question of "how things really work" for Chief Executive Officers in Alberta.

Research Design

This research study is classified as an interview design. Glesne (1999) wrote that "interviewing is a human interaction with all of its attendant uncertainties. As an interviewer, you are not a research machine, but you do pitch questions at your respondents with the intent of making the words fly" (p. 67). I chose six superintendents

to participate in this study, based on their availability and willingness to participate in the research. Initial contact was made in person at the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) meetings held in Edmonton on April 25, 26 and 27th, 2001. Informal verbal consent was secured, followed by formal written consent to participate in the study. Superintendents chosen for selection were full-time, responsible for only one school system, and have been in their position for at least one year. Refer to Table 3.1 for a demographic profile of the research participants.

The rationale for the interview design concerned the need to understand the participants' multiple, socially constructed realities. Glesne (1999) stated:

> Since interpretivists assume that they deal with multiple, socially constructed realities or qualities that are complex and indivisible into discrete variables, they regard their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them. To make their interpretations, the researchers must gain access to the multiple perspectives of the participants. Their qualitative study designs, therefore, generally focus on in-depth, long-term interaction with relevant people in one or several sites. (p. 5)

A structured interview schedule was used to achieve research objectives. Interview questions were semi-structured in nature. The initial interviews led to a revision of the instrument, with additional questions added to the interview schedule. After beginning with broadly defined issues, the study narrowed its focus as themes emerged in subsequent interviews.

Table 3.1

Profile of the Participants

Participant	Gender	Jurisdiction Rural/Suburban	Years in Position	Years in Education	Number of Schools
John	male	R	2	25	11
Harvey	male	R	9	30	21
Mathew	male	R	13	32	16
Don	male	R	10	30	20
Chris	male	R	13	40	28
Jack	male	S	1	31	15

Notes:

R = rural
S = suburban

Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation

Data were collected from primary interviews ranging from 60 to 90 minutes in duration. In addition, site visits were scheduled during which I spent up to two days with superintendents. Transcripts were verified with each participant, who noted any necessary editing. I engaged in frequent telephone and email communication with all of the participants to confirm that interpretations were accurate and to request further clarification of data that were unclear. Notes were kept for all exchanges with the participants, including interviews, site visits, telephone conversations, and College of

Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) meetings. Immediately after each interview, time was spent reviewing notes and making clarifications while the information was still fresh in my mind. In addition, tape- recorded debriefing occurred after each site visit, which were transcribed and used as data to inform my research findings. I attended numerous CASS Meetings in Edmonton and Calgary during 2001-2002 to gain an understanding of relevant issues pertaining to the Alberta superintendency. The most recent CASS Issues Forum in Calgary November 2001(see Table 6.1, p. 165) was a forum for Alberta superintendents to discuss current issues and the topics raised reaffirmed numerous research findings. These issues are analyzed in the discussion section of the dissertation. Finally, my doctoral field placement provided the opportunity to gain a first-hand knowledge of the operational realities of a chief executive officer, which enhanced my understanding of the position and informed my research.

All interviews were tape-recorded. Glesne (1999) stated that "the tape recorder provides a nearly complete record of what has been said and permits easy attention to the course of the interview" (p. 78). Pen and paper were used to note any potential problems with the questioning technique. Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed to glean emergent themes. A cautionary note accompanied the transcripts, indicating that they are a record of oral language, which may not be grammatically correct. Transcripts were returned to the participants for their perusal, and I completed editorial corrections if requested to do so. Executive summaries will be forwarded to the six research participants upon completion of the dissertation. The six superintendents were compared as a group to determine common emergent themes. I assumed that the interview

questions would provide data on a number of themes that would facilitate the understanding of current superintendent issues and management strategies.

Methodology

I used the interview method as the primary means of data collection. Fontana and Frey (2000) found that increasingly, qualitative researchers are "realizing that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results" (p. 646). For reasons of logistics and manageability, the number of participants was limited to six. I began with one participant and reviewed the richness of the resulting interview data. The findings ultimately determined the necessity to add additional questions. The participants were forwarded general themes to be discussed. Care was taken not to lead the subject in an inappropriate direction.

Trustworthiness Criteria

According to Lincoln and Guba (2000) "constructivism has replaced the traditional positivist criteria of internal and external validity with such terms as trustworthiness and authenticity" (p. 158). Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended several activities to ensure trustworthiness: prolonged engagement and persistent observation, peer debriefing, referential adequacy to check raw observation against raw data, and member checks.

In order to glean rich data, I engaged in an extensive initial interview with each participant. On the advice of my oral examining committee, the site visits conducted

with each superintendent ranged from one to two days in duration. In partial fulfillment of my doctoral studies I completed an extensive field placement with a school superintendent who eventually became a participant in the study. This field experience included 20 days of observational analysis of the variety of activities in which superintendents were routinely engaged. I was aware of the possibility of participants using practiced responses to answer interview questions, as was mentioned in the epistemology section. In other words, I was aware that the participants might tell the researcher what they thought he wanted to hear, but the site visits and guarantees for participant confidentiality provided relevant insights.

Peer debriefing was achieved via interaction with my supervisory committee, my professors and my colleagues. Finally, I followed Janesick's (2000) recommendation to maintain an ongoing journal, which facilitated rigorous documentation.

Concerning member checks, Rudestam and Newton (2001) stated:

> It is common in qualitative research to return to informants and present the entire written narrative, as well as interpretations derived from the information, with the intention of confirming the accuracy and credibility of the findings. (p. 99)

Transcript verification was accomplished by submitting transcripts to the participants for editing, omissions and deletions. Member checks were accomplished by sharing my interpretations of the data with the participants. I also confirmed in person at the site visits and CASS meetings whether the transcripts were an accurate representation of the interview discourse.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that transferability is possible if enough thick description is available to be able to make a reasoned judgement. I reviewed the findings with non-participating superintendents, who ensured me that the experiences and interpretation resonated with their experiences and rang true.

I have made the attempts discussed above to secure the trustworthiness of the study and believe that the findings have contributed to the understanding of the research questions being asked in this study.

Ethics and Protection of Participants

A Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board Graduate Student Application for Ethics Review was completed prior to the commencement of research. The nature and the purpose of the research were conveyed to the potential participants via a contact and consent letters. (See Appendices B and C.) The participants were informed via the consent/contact letters and were asked if they wanted to be volunteers in the research study. The participants were informed of their right to opt out of the research at any time during the study. Pseudonyms were assigned at the beginning of the study to guarantee confidentiality. Issues of confidentiality were ensured via sufficient vagueness, or by omitting relevant details and descriptions that potentially identified superintendents and school districts. The audiotapes were kept in a secure locked box at my residence. The transcriber signed a consent letter to keep all transcripts confidential, and all software were returned. All transcript files on the hard drive of the transcriptionist were purged when transcription was complete. Permission for secondary use of the data was sought in the initial informed consent letter issued to the research participants.

Research Timeline

This study was completed according to the following time line:

- January-May 2001--preparation and refinement of research proposal
- June 2001-- oral candidacy examination and selection of participants
- July-November 2001--completion of literature review, data collection, and initial data analysis.
- December-February 2002--completion of data analysis and commencement of dissertation.
- February-March 2002--revision and completion of the final dissertation text
- May 2002--oral examination on the dissertation.

Initial Interview Process

A practicing superintendent, included in the sample, was selected for an initial interview, which was conducted to check on the clarity of the semi-structured format, to identify any potential problems in administering the interview, and to obtain data for preliminary analysis. The interview questions were slightly modified at this stage. This process facilitated the preliminary examination of those aspects of superintendent issues and management that were not well understood or documented in the literature.

Questions were semi-structured to gain insights into the Alberta Superintendency, and these insights both supported and refuted literature findings. A further discussion of the findings as compared to the literature is presented in Chapter 6.

Summary

Vidich and Lyman (2000) explained the purpose of research:

> In its entirety, the research task requires both the act of observation and the act of communicating the analysis of these observations to others. The relationships that arise between these processes are not only the determinants of the character of the final research product, but also the arena of sociological methods less tractable to conventional understanding. (p. 38)

As a researcher, my goal was to gain a new understanding of the participants in this study. This goal was achieved with the assistance of the research participants. I gained a deeper understanding of the complex and intriguing role as well as the working realities of chief executive officers. The identification of current issues allowed for a comparison to past issues. I was able to determine the impact of educational reforms on the role of the superintendent. Finally, I have uncovered strategies that superintendents use to resolve these issues and in so doing, have gained a richer understanding of public education's most senior administrator. Glesne (1999) concluded that

> Qualitative research investigates the poorly understood territories of human interaction. Like scientists who seek to identify and understand the biological and geographic processes that create the patterns of a physical landscape, qualitative researchers seek to describe and understand the processes that create the patterns of human terrain. (p. 193)

The next chapter includes a presentation of the findings as related to the main research question. Each of the six participants' issues are identified and summarized in

Table 4.1. The chapter concludes with a summary and discussion of the issues and resolutions for Alberta school superintendents.

Chapter 4

Research Findings: Issues and Resolutions

The purpose of the following chapter is to present findings related to the specific research question "What are the current issues facing Alberta School superintendents and what strategies are used to resolve these issues?" The chapter presents the findings and issues/resolutions for each one of the participants. An overview of the twenty-three issues identified by the participants is summarized in Table 4.1. The chapter concludes with a summary and discussion of the common and single issues related to the research question. Single issues are identified and organized thematically in Tables 4.2 and 4.3. Table 4.2 illustrates 17 issues that participants identified as being of concern. Upon further analysis, I have categorized these issues under the themes of administration, governance, policy and society. The significance of these themes will be discussed further in Chapter 6 under the heading "Single Issues for Superintendents."

John

Issue: Change of Leadership

John distinguished the change of administrator leadership as a jurisdictional issue. He described the change of leadership not only as a rural issue but also as prevalent throughout all of Alberta.

> *I think one of the concerns in rural jurisdictions, and it's probably a concern across the province, is the challenge of leadership in schools, specifically principalships and vice principalships and it's almost a baby boomer situation.*

Table 4.1

A Summary of Superintendents' Issues

Participants	John	Harvey	Mathew	Don	Chris	Jack
Bureaucratic Concerns			Y			
Busing Costs		Y				
Catholic 4x4s					Y	
Curricular Concerns		Y				
Declining School Populations		Y				
Equitable Education	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Financial Management					Y	
Foot and Mouth Disease					Y	
Funding Frameworks				Y	Y	Y
Internet Threats					Y	
Leadership	Y	Y				
Sabbatical Leave Grievance						Y
School-Based Management	Y					
School Closures		Y			Y	
School of Choice	Y					
School Violence					Y	
Separate School Education	Y					
Special Needs					Y	
Staff Development				Y		
Staffing Teachers	Y	Y	Y	Y		
Teacher Retention	Y		Y			
Travel Time	Y					
Trustee Role	Y					

Notes:
Y = yes

Table 4.2

Single Issues for Superintendents

Issue	Issue	Issue
Bureaucratic Concerns	Foot and Mouth Disease	Separate School Education
Busing Costs	Internet Threats	Special Needs
Catholic 4x4s	Sabbatical Leave	Staff Development
Curricular Concerns	School-Based Management	Travel Time
Declining School Populations	Schools of Choice	Trustee Role
Financial Management	School Violence	

Table 4.3

Thematic Representation of Single Issues

Administration	Governance	Policy	Society
Busing Costs	Bureaucratic Concerns	Catholic 4x4s	Internet Threats
Curricular Concerns	School-Based Management	Sabbatical Leave	School Violence
Declining School Populations	Trustee Role	Schools of Choice	Foot and Mouth Disease
Financial Management		Separate School Education	
Special Needs			
Staff Development			
Travel Time			

Resolution: Leadership Training

The impending administrative shortage was planned for under the guise of training for aspiring leaders. The specific professional development programs included Franklin Covey Training and The Four Rules of Leadership Seminars. One contention regarding leadership training concerned the paucity of masters programs for aspiring leaders, predominantly because of the geographic isolation of the jurisdiction.

> *I guess the third part of that to address leadership was the ability to have a masters level program in central Alberta. What we found was the hardship of attending a university particularly in Alberta whether it was in Lethbridge, Calgary or Edmonton prevented some of our people that we thought could have become leaders from enrolling in the masters level courses.*

In addition to the leadership training, a Master of Education program was offered at a local college.

> *But we've started a program with San Diego State University and we are in the fourth year of offering the program right here, and we now also offer not only the winter program, but the campus summer program where we run the San Diego program right here at the college this year and had an excellent response for this program as well.*

During our site visit John expressed concern for the future of this masters program. It was subject to funding review, which had direct implications for future course offerings. John was concerned that if funding were denied, the future of the program could be short-lived, leaving aspiring leaders with diminished professional development alternatives.

Issue: Rural Staffing

Rural staffing was perceived as a jurisdictional issue. The specialty areas in high school, such as science and math, were of the greatest concern. Presenting a full science and math course offering was logistically challenging because of the ruralness of the jurisdiction's high schools and the challenge of staffing these positions.

Resolution: Placement of Teachers

A specific strategy used to address the issue of rural staffing was the strategic placement of teachers within proximity of several schools. This strategy provides the possibility of a single teacher fulfilling multiple roles at numerous school sites.

> *I think some of the ways we've tried to address that is with band people, we try to locate them so that they can teach in different schools, band programs or with travel between the two schools, that's been one of the successful ones. We've worked with the college to look at offering some of the CTS courses there, they have the labs, and actually have a school within a school.*

Issue: Teacher Retention

John described teacher retention as a challenging jurisdiction issue. Teacher retention was identified as part of the overall staffing issue. Retaining teachers on a long-term basis to address high turnover rates is a constant challenge.

Resolution: Professional Development

John specified that significant time and effort were being consumed on professional development to address the teacher retention issue.

I guess what we do with our teachers is spend a lot of time and effort on professional development, helping them do better at what they do. We've found that it makes it a pretty good place to work and that makes people want to stay.

In addition, John alluded to responsible student behavior, which he characterized as "typical" of rural school jurisdictions and desirable for teachers.

There are certainly lots of good things about rural divisions because these kids are rural kids who tend to be more responsible and often live on farms, they've got chores to do, they've stronger support from their parents.

Issue: Role Changes of the School Trusteeship

John indicated that the role of the school trusteeship had significantly changed since the educational restructuring of the mid-1990s. He described the significant role of collecting taxes that had been removed since the educational reforms. In addition, the roles of collective bargaining and policy making were diminished. The net result has left current trustees grappling with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

I've seen in the 1990s the restructuring and the changing governance, and I noticed in the trusteeship where before one of their major roles was to collect taxes because it was a local tax issue base and that was a fairly substantial role. That's been taken away. Another role for them is collective bargaining, the latest initiative, that's almost moved to a provincial scene then if you look at your other one, the policy making, so what I find is that they struggle sometimes with their own role.

Resolution: Role Clarification

John proposed that role clarification of the school trusteeship should be a future priority for the school board. He perceived the school trustees as acting "more like community reps rather than an entire corporate board." In order to resolve this issue, John has changed the perception of the role of the trustee from reactive to proactive. John views his trustees as "ambassadors" for public education who are expected to make known the successes of the jurisdiction to educational stakeholders in the community. *The Annual Educational Results Report* has been collated into a brochure format that trustees use as a basis to facilitate discussion and promote public education.

> *The resolution that I favor is to encourage trustees to become local ambassadors for public education; rather than being reactive to community issues, to be proactive in promoting and celebrating the good things that are happening. To this end we have developed a brochure to describe our Annual Educational Results Report. It is our intent that individual trustees will host 'key community stakeholder' meetings and use the Brochure as a guide to lead the discussion and let the community know of the many good programs and projects our students and teachers are involved in. As well, trustees will look for opportunities to present our brochure on results at Chambers of Commerce, Town Council, Lion's Club and other such meetings. Administration will attend when necessary in order to provide organizational support, but will not adopt a lead role. Certainly trustees will continue to bear responsibility for policy development, centralized budget deliberation, and bargaining but the focus will move from the reactive (collect and defend taxes) to the proactive (promote local public education).*

He specifically referred to the limitations of a jurisdiction operating under the Carver Model.

> *Some boards have adopted the Carver Model, whereby the board focuses only on policy development and administration makes all decisions based on these policies, with no appeal to the board. This model has great merit but it is my experience that trustees in rural areas like to be responsive to their own community needs and be able to help resolve issues. To be able to do this under the Carver model, board policies would become very narrow in scope in order to direct administration.*

Issue: Travel Time

Travel time was a concern for the administration of the school jurisdiction. The logistics of conducting meetings that staff members can attend with a reasonable amount of travel time presented challenges. In addition, travel time had limited the amount of school visits possible per year. "Travel time from our southwest corner to our northeast is about 2-1/2 hours, lots of windshield time that is always a factor on how you plan as a superintendent."

Resolution: Geographical Liaisons

A strategy implemented by the superintendent involved having an assistant superintendent designated to manage a specific geographical area. When problems occurred, the area assistant superintendent would be in reasonable proximity to address the issue.

Issue: School Based Management

John identified a change in the school leadership model since the educational restructuring of the 1990s. Prior to the educational reforms, instructional leadership was considered a priority for school based leadership. Post-restructuring has placed an emphasis on a diversity of leadership skills to match the changing educational milieu.

> *Certainly then that ties in with our need to create leaders that have perhaps some different skills, whereas pre 1990, I think the real focus was on instructional leadership, and that type of thing, and now they really need to know how to budget, how to work with school councils, a more political type scenario.*

Resolution: Professional Development

John indicated that the assistant superintendents and liaison accountant have been delegated the task of the professional-development provision necessary for inexperienced school leaders and support staff. John added the caveat that school leaders avoid the transformation into managers:

> *It's my belief that we don't want to turn these principals into managers. We need to get a lot of the management stuff off their plate and let them be the leaders that they need to be. So we are supporting a lot of effort towards them now.*

Issue: Separate School Education in Alberta

John argued that the growth of the separate school system in Alberta has had a deleterious effect on his rural school jurisdiction primarily because of the fragmentation of rural school jurisdictions and the struggle to offer a variety of school programs, particularly at the high school level.

It's an issue to the rural schools just because the numbers are so small in the rural schools, anyway if you fragment the population by perhaps a third, then all that happens really is that whereas you've struggled offering a variety of programs before, you're probably going to have an even more difficult time offering any variety.

Resolution: Technology

Technology has been employed to address the fragmentation of rural school jurisdictions. John indicated that his jurisdiction was one of the first to use a virtual school in Alberta. *Odyssey* is an example of the current computer-managed learning system that alleviates the demand to create novel curricula and permit a teacher to focus on pedagogy.

Infrastructure concerns such as bandwidth are issues associated with distance delivery:

We have a real issue with bandwidth in our division even though we are networked, there's a, until we get the fibre optics where, you know, you set yourself up for failure. I see some good opportunities to deliver coursework in that fashion once we do get our increased bandwidth.

Issue: Schools of Choice

John indicated that choice of schooling for rural students who are in proximity to a larger urban center is a contentious issue. In effect, a student can be bused from John's jurisdiction and attend a larger, more sophisticated modern high school offering many programs. The competition and choice promoted in the Alberta education system in such a scenario can be a contentious issue for rural jurisdictions.

Resolution: Funding Review

John suggested that funding for sparsity and distance requirements need to be increased in order to address this issue. He indicated that increased funding would have direct implications regarding class size and program availability.

> *Rural Schools in this situation need to be funded at a higher rate through distance and sparsity funding. This would allow the smaller rural school to offer smaller class sizes, and a wider variety of programs thereby providing equity of opportunity and ensuring viability.*

Harvey

Issue: Declining Rural Populations

Harvey asserted that declining rural populations have direct implications on transportation costs and curricular concerns regarding the providing of educational programs to remote regions with diminutive student enrollments.

> *Well, it's affecting us by declining rural student population, and many of our students live too far away to be bused to central locations, so we're faced with the challenge of providing educational programs in remote regions with small numbers of children.*

Harvey identified the challenges of providing educational programs in remote areas with small numbers of students. Declining enrollments have influenced high school course offerings and variety:

> *We will have triple course combos in our small senior high schools in the fine arts areas. The drama 10, 20, 30 it's an automatic. If you have enough kids to run a*

drama program they're going to be from grade 10 to 12, and the teachers accommodate that very well. It would be the same for music, band, instrument and music. Some take choral music. And also in fine arts, graphic arts. And there it's a little bit easier, I think, to put grade 10, 11 and 12 together in drama because you can find those grade 12's that are more accomplished can do higher level activities than the grade 10's who are entering. It's a little more difficult in instrumental music, however, we managed that and we've come out with some pretty good bands.

Resolution: Combined Grade Grouping

Harvey described combined grade groupings and multi-aged grouping strategies as well as thematic approaches that addressed declining rural school populations:

For example, in this school division alone I've got one one-room school house of the old traditional variety, now it is on a Hutterite colony. All Hutterite colonies, I think tend to operate this way, but our teacher there this year has 15 students grade K-10, and she had those students write the grade 3, 6 and 9 provincial achievement tests. They do achieve at or above the provincial average, believe it or not.

He described multi-aged groupings as standard operating procedure for the past 20 years. Thematically integrated approaches and multi-aged groupings have been used to address the issue of declining rural populations, thereby allowing small rural schools to continue to exist despite the obstacles.

Resolution: On-Line Technology

In addition to thematically integrated approaches and combined grade configurations, on-line technology was proposed as a feasible solution to manage curricular concerns within a declining rural school population. The one-room schoolhouse teacher would have greater access to learning resources via the Internet:

> *So that's where the advent of on line education, technology, electronic education is really going to be a boom to assist them [teachers] because if we have good coursework, good lesson materials that can be delivered on line, that one room school teacher can have some very well developed and meaningful activities that the grade 10s can be working on social studies on a computer screen while she's spending time with the K-4 kids doing elementary reading and having the older kids help the younger kids, very much the way it was 50 years ago, or 55, 70 years ago in the one room school houses across this country.*

Resolution: Teacher Community Relations

Harvey reported the importance of positive teacher-community relations as a means to address the issue of declining school enrollments. The obstacles inherent within small rural schools are potentially ominous. The concessions that a teacher and community have to make in order to create a positive learning environment are great. Multi-aged grouping and thematic strategies require numerous support structures, which have the potential to strain teacher/community relationships.

> *That really takes the right teacher, it takes the right cooperation from the community. And it's one thing in a Hutterite colony where there is very strict orderly kind of authority, and how can I best put it? The social milieu is such that*

respect for authority, and to follow the rules is still very much accepted and taken for granted, providing the teacher has been able to establish credibility with the boss of the colony, things go wonderfully.

Issue: School Closures

Declining school populations have necessitated school closures within rural school jurisdictions. Harvey indicated that parents identified their school as the focal point of their community and perceive school closures as tantamount to its demise. Resistance to school closures has been intense:

But it's that whole attitude that pervades rural Alberta, and I'm sure rural North America that we don't want to lose our community, and we will fight you tooth, nail and hammer to see to it that we do not lose our community, and our school is the focal to that community.

Harvey reported that the resistance to rural school closures challenges the Ministry of Learning to examine the viability of maintaining rural schools as opposed to "wholesale consolidation."

Resolution: Relationship Building

Harvey described the necessity of relationship-building with educational stakeholders to ameliorate tensions associated with school closures. Staff and parent communities typically demand an audience, which necessitates superintendent involvement in facilitating stakeholder discussion groups. Harvey reported a noticeable alteration in stakeholder behavior as a result of educational restructuring.

Our staff now no longer clicks their heels and salute to military order. They expect to be heard, and they expect to be treated with dignity and respect, and

they really demand that. It's even more so with their parent communities and particularly since the great reforms of the mid 1990s through the Klein revolution or however we want to put our tongue in our cheek and describe that, there was a real encouragement for parents to speak out and demand what they wanted for themselves.

The specific measure to manage school closures was identified as community consultation, which involves the listening process. Superintendents need to ensure their community that the decision to close a school is not a moot point and that consultations will be open and democratic. These meetings can take the structure of open community meetings conducted over an extended period of time. In addition, the communities should problem-solve to generate potential alternatives for the school closures as well as use the services of consultants to execute consolidation studies. Finally, according to Harvey, the superintendent should grant a reprieve if anticipated demographic growth is predicted in the near future.

So that whole idea of consultation with your public, I believe it's where administration is now, and I believe that if administrators and governments, i.e. boards of directors, elected officials don't recognize that they are doomed to failure, the era that you could get away with the military model I believe is gone. We need to build cultures in our organizations where they are people oriented, they're relationship oriented, where people feel valued.

Issue: Teacher Shortages

An imminent teacher shortage is an anticipated issue for Harvey's jurisdiction. Prior to regionalization, the teacher turnover rate was relatively low.

Teacher shortage here, we've had a better year than we've had in a number of years, believe it or not. Oh, it was really tough, 10 years ago and it wasn't because of a shortage. I was Human Resources Officer as deputy superintendent back in the late '80's and early '90's, and I would have a thousand applications on my computer file that were kept current, and we only would maintain them for one year, and we had advised each applicant that we'll keep your application on file for one year, if you wish to reactivate it you need to send us information to do that. There were a number of years where I would have 1000 applications on file and of course we were only able to place a few, the most I think that I ever replaced out of, well, this is before regionalization where we would have had a 150 teachers, one year I had to replace 27. So all of these kids that had gone through 4 years of university training to become a teacher couldn't get jobs, and they finally said, well, I'm going into real estate.

Resolution: Salary Increase

Harvey suggested salary increases as a means to attract and retain teachers to replenish the projected vacancies. These salary increases would attract beginning teachers as well as individuals who may have chosen different career paths because of a dearth of vacancies and reasonable salaries. Harvey predicted the potential for labor unrest if the government did not provide an attractive salary package for Alberta teachers. The Alberta Teachers' Association indicated that it would be seeking a comparable wage increase to that which the nurses' union had negotiated in the previous year.

So there was a glut then, and now we've come to a place where there is not a glut, and we're going to come into a massive retirement in very short order, and there

just isn't the pool to fill in after us. So that will become a real pervading issue, and I believe that because that issue underlies the current impending labor strike between our government and our teachers and that our teachers are saying, in this province, that if we want to attract quality people to go into education, and unfortunately attract teachers from other provinces that maybe aren't as wealthy as Alberta is, then pay us well. Don't make it rhetoric that we're the best paid in the province and then find that Ontario and B. C. are already ahead of us. Put your money where your mouth is and make us the best paid teachers.

Issue: Administrator Shortages

In addition to the projected teacher shortages, the imminent paucity of school-based and senior level public school administrators will be a reality in the near future. An issue for all jurisdictions in Alberta will be the ability to fill anticipated administrative and senior administrative positions with highly qualified individuals.

Resolution: Succession Planning

Mentorship was a jurisdictional initiative proposed to resolve this issue. Mentorship was identified as a useful process to attract and teach school principals who aspired to be senior administrators.

One of the concerns that I did mark down for you is succession planning for positions like mine, and in our own jurisdiction we're looking at that right now and trying to attract quality administrators who feel that they would like to take on this kind of work and get them some mentorship so we're bringing a new director into our central office in this next year, someone who's been a principal in our system for a number of years, with the hope that he will learn the ropes

about what it's like being a central office person because we're going to need central administration teams as well as school based administration teams, and I believe there will be a shortage there.

Mathew

Issue: Teacher Supply

The issue of teacher supply was identified as a priority concern for Mathew's school jurisdiction. Mathew described the challenge of maintaining a full complement of teachers for each school year, given the luring appeal of large urban centres. In a *Jurisdictional Report to Alberta Learning* (2001), recruiting and retaining qualified teachers and support staff were identified as issues:

> Specialty areas have in some cases, remained vacant and educational programs have not been offered or significant adjustments to the educational programs have been made. Many factors contribute to the problem of supply of competent professional and support staff. Some of the factors are external to the jurisdiction and some factors are unique to the division. In most cases, the jurisdiction is not able to influence or adequately address the impact of the factors within our current level of funding and in all cases, cannot change the environment which has created the problem.
>
> Some of the factors that have been identified are
>
> <u>External to the jurisdiction</u>
>
> - The supply of teachers in a competitive international market

- The amount of teachers entering the profession compared to the number retiring
- The amount of naturally occurring vacancies in southern jurisdictions as result of an aging work force and
- The cost of living in the north (food, gas, utilities)

Internal to the jurisdiction

- A major economic boom in the certain communities associated with the development of natural resources (gas and lumber)
- Continued economic development in certain areas and
- A significant population growth in many of the areas.

(*Jurisdictional Report*, 2001, p. 1)

Mathew described this issue as one of the realities of a northern school jurisdiction; however, with the change in economic environment within the school jurisdiction and the external factors influencing the recruitment and retention of qualified staff, the future viability of the jurisdiction has been placed in question.

Resolution: Teacher Recruitment

The issue of teacher supply was addressed in the form of an aggressive teacher recruitment initiative. This initiative included a Canada-wide search to recruit potential high school Math and Physics teachers. Monetary incentives associated with the recruitment campaign were identified as follows:

> *We're sending recruiting teams across Canada. We're saying that we will go anywhere to bring people to the jurisdiction. We offer some incentive to come, not*

huge, no where near what the industrial sector would consider, no where near what we would consider for a senior executive, but a little bit of money, maybe $1,500 to help them move to our community, that's one of the things we're doing. Two, we're getting out early, we're getting out fast, and we're beating other people in getting people signed up early. We're hiring on spec when we don't have openings. We say, we think we might have two Math openings, we'll hire three Math teachers, and if necessary one of those Math teachers will have to teach junior high school Math for a year, or something like that.

Mathew discussed the required funding necessary to implement teacher recruitment in his jurisdiction. The demand for secondary Math and Science teachers was evident:

Oh, yeah, it's costing me $200,000 a year right now. It's supply and demand, and it's that simple. Right now the demand is higher than supply for specialized teachers. It's not there yet for elementary generalists, and it's not there yet for junior high school people, but it certainly is getting there for the harder senior high school courses. Harder by meaning the more Science, Math type of thing, where the softer ones, Social Studies, English, they're still relatively easy to pick people up for.

Mathew identified the role of fund developer as a crucial component of his duties as superintendent. He argued that increased funding could ameliorate teacher recruitment problems.

We're working at getting more money, I mean, that's part of the job of the superintendent to get money. With money you can solve problems, it's that simple. Now if you have money and you throw it at class size, or the traditional ways that

a lot of school jurisdictions use money, we're not going to win. I mean, we're not going to have the solution. We already have relatively small class sizes, but where we're going to need money is if there's a great Math teacher in Newfoundland who wants to come, we've got to be able to say, look, we're going to cut you a cheque for $15,000, not $1,500, to help you move there, and we're going to say if you're there for two years we will start you, sponsoring you for your masters program, and if you've been there for five years we're going to give you a year off to go on and do this. My heavens! That almost starts making a teacher look like a professional, you know, which would be just a wonderful thing to do, and then we can out-compete. We have to be able to out-compete the cities. We have to be able to out-compete even home, just the thing of being home saying, wow!, I get a class of 20 kids, after 5 years I get a sabbatical, you know, these guys figure that I'm important.

Teacher recruitment is an issue which additional government funding could potentially address in the form of relocation and professional development expenses. In a report to Alberta Learning, a special request for an additional two million dollars in funding was proposed to address jurisdictional issues such as teaching turnover, teacher recruitment costs, training and development costs, cost of living issues, and sparsity and distance issues.

Issue: Delivering Education to Small Communities

Mathew described the challenges of delivering an equitable education that was comparable to that offered in a large urban center. One of the inherent difficulties with

this issue is the ability of a jurisdiction to offer sufficient variety and depth of program by using traditional methods at the high school level.

> *How do you deliver math 31? How do you allow for an equitable type of program for children in that school as opposed to Harry Ainley in Edmonton or any major school? That becomes a really major problem. I mean, offering any depth of program for these kids is absolutely impossible. Absolutely impossible using traditional methods.*

Resolution: Audio Graphic and Distance Education

Mathew identified the potential of current on-line technology to address the inequity problem. Current on-line technology provides students with an option to take specialist courses otherwise not offered because of the lack of specialist high school teachers. The Supernet is anticipated to address the issue of high school inequity. This technology could potentially provide real-time video quality instructional capacities. In other words, a teacher in an urban center will be able to teach a student in a rural setting via the Supernet by using a fully interactive medium with voice and video technology.

> *I just came from a meeting with Craig Montgomerie in this institution, we're working right now with the advent of Super Net, once it comes in, to putting in full Mpeg 2 video in each one of our high schools so we can teach across the school. So if I have a physics teacher in one community, that physics teacher can teach physics to all five of my high schools at the same time. It means all the high schools have to operate on the same timetable, and that sort of stuff to make this happen, but it does happen, and it does happen fairly effectively, although it is not popular amongst our students.*

On-line technology is not a panacea for high school equity. Logistical concerns need to be considered in order to administer this technology. Mathew also indicated that bandwidth and funding are aspects related to this resolution. The government funding necessary to provide a full 2mgs bandwidth is costly, and the potential for future delays is great. Mathew concluded this aspect of his discussion on distance delivery by commenting on his personal vision: "so our vision is that we should be able to allow distance delivery of a much higher quality, which may involve the movement of students as well."

Issue: Bureaucratic Concerns

Mathew described the inherent difficulties in a bureaucratic decision making process characteristic of public education. The issues relevant for both urban and rural school jurisdictions had differences that a bureaucratic government decision-making body had difficulty acknowledging. Government mandates, such as student rights to a second language, present many logistical complications for northern rural jurisdictions currently experiencing teacher supply concerns.

> *They [Alberta Learning] tend to be prescriptive. They tend to try to control and that sort of stuff, and the answers in Edmonton are not the answers in our jurisdiction, so if the mainstream in Alberta is the approximately eight urban school jurisdictions, plus the surrounding school jurisdictions, which is probably 80% of the population of students in Alberta, a set of solutions that will work very effectively with those people. That same set of solutions will not work in our jurisdiction's schools. Let's take an example. Right now Lyle Oberg is talking about that every kid should have access to a second language. It's a good*

educational goal. There's nothing wrong with that goal at all. The question is: how do you teach French, or Hebrew, or Ukranian, or Japanese and give the kids any choice when you've got three teachers?

Resolution: Customer Satisfaction versus System Satisfaction

Mathew described the difference between customer satisfaction and system satisfaction. He indicated that stakeholders are satisfied with the jurisdictional progress; however, system satisfaction levels take precedent and shape provincial administrative and curricular agendas.

Also, bureaucrats tend to be tremendously rulebook bound. They don't seem to be able to move out of that rural set into a problem solving set. They don't understand what a goal is, how to measure an objective, or any of that sort of stuff. They have no concept of what customer satisfaction is. Basically it's system satisfaction is what they want. So you're going to have a dysfunctionality when you have a jurisdiction that sees itself very much as a customer satisfaction organization against a citizen, or the system satisfaction organization.

Issue: Teacher Retention

Mathew identified teacher retention as an issue within his school jurisdiction. When Mathew assumed the superintendency 13 years ago, the annual teacher turnover rate was approximately 70%. According to a *Jurisdictional Report to Alberta Learning* (2001), a natural teacher turnover rate of approximately 10% is considered healthy for an organization. Table 4.4 provides statistical data for teacher and administrator turnover rates since 1997 for Mathew's jurisdiction.

Table 4.4

Teaching Staff Turnover Rates

Year	Teachers				Administrators		
	Total	No. Hired	%		Total	No. Hired	%
1997-98	176	30	17		17	3	18
1998-99	180	31	17		18	2	11
1999-00	182	36	20		20	5	25
2000-01	188	50	27		22	13	59

(*Jurisdictional Report*, 2001, p. 2)

Although the rates have been reduced from a 70% turnover to a low of 17% for teachers and 11% for administrators, the rates have increased since 1997.

Resolution: Professional Development

Professional development is a strategy to ensure retention and excellence. The two forms of professional development currently operational within this school jurisdiction were aimed at the specific issue of teacher retention. The first form of professional development focused on leadership and targeted aspiring administrators.

> *We have a course that we're offering called Leadership, and it's basically to train administrators in our jurisdiction. It is a university level course. It is a masters level course. It's accepted at the U of A, U of C, U of L and San Diego, probably*

any other university that we were chatting with as well. Now you have to understand, we have approximately 200 teachers, and that puts almost a half of them, well, certainly a third, anyhow, through a leadership program.

The second form of professional development targeted teachers and aimed at keeping them at the primacy of the educational field. Mathew indicated that veteran teachers' professional development required attention, citing insufficient professional development offerings for this demographic.

The group that we're not doing as well on are probably our senior teachers who don't want to look towards leadership as a direction that they want to go, and we encourage them to do other things.

Resolution: Salaries

A second strategy to address the issue of teacher retention involves using a decreased timeline to achieve a maximum salary. Teachers can achieve a maximum salary in 8 years as opposed to the traditional 11-year time line, facilitating increased salaries in a decreased timeline:

Okay, you're on an 11 or a 12-step grid, in our jurisdiction you're on 8. So what we try and do is get their salaries up as quickly as we possibly can so in those very prime beginning years, one through eight, they start establishing homes there. And once you consider that you're home, then your possibility of staying are much, much higher.

Resolution: Mentorship

Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) funded mentors assist new teachers with their initial classroom responsibilities. The implicit underpinnings of such a strategy are that the new teachers require assistance during their first year to cope with the inevitable myriad of responsibilities. Mathew indicated that "survival kits" were created to facilitate a smooth transition into the teaching realities of the school jurisdiction. In addition to the "survival kits," a large portion of the first-year teacher's planning is completed for them prior to commencing work in their schools.

> *We have, with our brand new teachers, through the AISI project two lead teachers in our jurisdiction. Their job, 90% of their job is to make the beginning teacher as effective as possible. For example, they along with committees of more experienced teachers in the jurisdiction have put together what we used to call 'survival kits'. I don't know what the heck we call them now. But basically the first month of a teacher's assignment is planned for them when they walk in the door. Basically then, the teacher can see how to plan because they're not prepared on how to plan. They can start dealing with relationships with children. They can start dealing with classroom management issues and that sort of stuff instead of trying to figure out everything that they have to do. It also shows them the style of planning that's going in our jurisdiction.*

Future Strategies:

The following strategies were proposed in Mathew's Report to Alberta Learning (2001) and were contingent upon receiving an additional two million dollars of

government funding that would assist in the endeavor to attract and retain competent staff:

- Provision to provide Moving Allowance to people moving into the jurisdiction (cost estimate $75,000-$125,000)
- Develop an incentive program that keeps our current staff--i.e. long service, isolation (cost estimate $400,000-$500,000)
- Provide a Northern Living Allowance that reflects the escalating costs of residing in the remote northern towns (cost estimate $550,00-$650,000)
- Continue to broker rental accommodations in areas that do not have an affordable market, guaranteeing rental and acting as a rental agency (cost estimate $25,000)
- Develop an aggressive recruitment strategy that entices university students to sign on with the jurisdiction when they are in the last two years of their program. This strategy may include a student-loan forgiveness program or tuition assistance (cost estimate $25,000-$50,000)
- Provide assistance with the cost of travel north. Current provisions exist within the Income Tax Act (cost estimate $550,000-$650,000)
- Ensure the provisions of the Collective Agreement and the Terms of Employment are congruent with our efforts (cost estimate $375,000) (*Jurisdictional Report*, 2001, p. 6)

Don

Issue: Securing Quality Personnel

Don identified the challenge of securing quality teaching personnel in his school jurisdiction. The challenge for the superintendent in securing quality teaching is related to the educator's ability and willingness to live in a rural setting. Don characterized this issue as an ongoing struggle inherent in northern rural school jurisdictions. He described the increasing difficulty the jurisdiction had with attracting teachers from the urban center.

> *Not all teachers are inclined to work in rural locations. One of our observations is that there's a significant pool of people that are either beginning or not far into the teaching profession, and they would rather stick around Edmonton or Calgary and do sub and supply teaching and maybe some temporary contracts, kind of wait for the opportunity to get into a position here in urban area rather than strike out into the field kind of thing. And so our pool is usually quite a bit smaller than what on the face appears to be available.*

Resolution: Bursary Program

The bursary program was identified as a specific strategy to resolve the issue of securing quality personnel. Don alluded to the genesis of this bursary program dating back to the 1960s. The strategy targets third and fourth year university students who commit themselves to working for the jurisdictions for several years.

> *In terms of strategies, our jurisdictions reestablished a bursary program, again we used to have in the '60s, and wound it up a long time ago, and so we're into a couple of years now into a program where we target some bursaries at third and*

fourth year education students and they're willing to commit to come and work for us for a couple of years.

Resolution: Relocation Allowance

Don has implemented a resettlement allowance program to address the issue of securing quality personnel. A specific range of relocation funding ranging from $500-$2500 allowance is available depending on the candidate's relocation distance. A secondary concern emerged regarding the potential for violation of Alberta Teachers' Association collective agreements concerning the perception of the relocation allowances. In other words, the Alberta Teachers' Association was concerned that clauses in the collective agreements could potentially be violated if the allowance were perceived as a portion of the candidate's salary. In order to address this issue, the relocation allowance was given to the candidate prior to commencement of employment.

Don acknowledged that a variety of the educational stakeholders such as school administrators, school councils and community members were concerned about the reality of having a stabilized work force, one that retains staff for more than several years and addresses the reality of the proverbial "revolving door" regarding staffing. Don maintained that the reality of northern jurisdictions, removed from the urban centers, is the inherent struggle to secure and maintain quality teacher personnel.

It's one thing to get people for a year, getting people to stay and settle in, and after a while communities get pretty sensitive to that. We have a couple of communities that people settle in and are generally fairly happy to stay in for a longer term, but we have others that it's almost a revolving door kind of thing, and that the parents in those communities, I think, some don't appreciate

whenever there's a person who's perceived to be a good capable staff member in a year or two they're gone, and so that kind of staffing to provide some good quality instruction and continuity in some of the less desirable locations, or what people perceive as less desirable locations, is a real challenge.

Issue: Program Equity

Don described the issue of program equity as an overriding issue for his jurisdiction. He identified the disparate views regarding program quality in rural school jurisdictions as compared to large urban centres: "There's getting to be a feeling that there's pretty big gulf between the, both the breadth and the richness of the programs that school are providing as one moves across the province."

Don asserted that teachers struggle to provide quality programming because of the breadth of curricula and lack of qualified educators. He identified the challenge to provide quality Physics instruction and extra-curricular activities associated with the demands of secondary education. A common thread that emerged was the satisfaction with elementary schools but an increasing dissatisfaction with the quality of education provided for the secondary school students.

Resolution: Distance Delivery

Don indicated that his jurisdiction was increasingly dependent on a distance-delivery model to address instructional needs for communities with declining enrollments. Instructional concerns are associated with this delivery model, including a parental preference to have "real" teachers instructing students as opposed to virtual educators.

I think generally people in small rural communities, they recognize we made a lifestyle choice and there are advantages to being here, and we know that our children don't have the same kind of program opportunities in school as, say students in large urban composite school, and that kind of thing. And up to a point, they're comfortable with that, but I think there does come a point where they start to feel like our kids are being, whatever, squeezed, short changed, whatever people perceive as the core, or what makes up, and what we sort of call 'a basic education in Alberta,' we struggle, especially at the secondary level.

Issue: Funding Frameworks

One of the issues that emerged from the restructuring of the Alberta educational system in the 1990s concerned educational funding models. The new formula based on a per capita or per student funding model and additional funding for sparsity and distance fails, according to Don, to address equity issues in education. Don asserted that prior to the restructuring, communities had more control over taxation and could levy increases if communities deemed them appropriate for educational initiatives. The current model does not allow for communities to control the direction of their tax dollars with the degree of freedom experienced prior to restructuring in the 1990s. The net result of the reallocation of tax dollars has created tensions between smaller schools and larger schools and has implications for the willingness of Alberta to support rural education in the future.

And there isn't much capacity to address them other than by an internal redistribution, and so that sets up a continual sort of tension between the larger schools and the smaller ones, and how much resources should be directed away

from the larger schools toward, to sustain the small ones, and versus how much consolidation should go on, and then that gets into the sort of the whole community dynamics thing about the place of the school, and sustaining small communities, and all that. And you end up with a balancing act that sort of works but nobody feels really good about, and at the public policy level, I think as Alberta increasingly shifts from rural to urban we're eventually going to have to come to terms with this question of what, how much of a rural community infrastructure are we willing to sustain.

Resolution: Baseline Funding

Don suggested a government baseline-funding program as a possible resolution to the funding frameworks issue. Essentially, the per capita funding would not be permitted to plummet below a certain minimum level necessary to sustain basic equitable programming in the specific school jurisdiction. He maintained that funding has to be given sufficient flexibility to permit senior administrators and school boards the latitude to meet equity and sustainability issues.

It's going to be interesting to see if the province does eventually get into a really serious review of its funding framework if we're going to get back to some type of either a local requisition or some type of a block grant school jurisdictions that is untied, at least the equivalent of a local requisition piece, flexible money, a significant amount of flexible money that boards can be politically accountable for at the local level in terms of what goes where to meet some of these equity issues and what gets sustained.

Issue: Staff Development

Don indicated that the results of the educational restructuring of the 1990s have had a direct impact upon staff development or professional development within his school jurisdiction. Don perceived schools as having had adept centralized professional development initiatives prior to the restructuring in Alberta public education. However, Don maintained that harmful effects have ensued as a result of the move towards site-based management. He believes that jurisdictional professional development is in a state of disarray.

> *We have, at best, a patchwork quilt. I'm not sure that the restructuring and the shift to site based decision-making has contributed to effective staff development, professional development in the rural environment. A few schools have taken that and done some good things with it, and others have, really it's, they haven't been able to sort of tie together and focus the effort, and of course that's all in conjunction with the shift to, the policy shift to provincial, or considered that continuing competency approach for teachers with professional growth plans, and there's been a lot of rhetoric about more emphasis on teacher professional development and the individual growth and what not, but it's a real broken front.*

Resolution: Centralized Staff Development

Don argued that previous centralized professional development efforts were more focused than the current site-based managed staff development. Jurisdictional efforts to address this issue are currently focused on pooling instructional funding in attempts to centralize staff development. Don's rationale for the pooling of funding is "to increase the capacity to manage professsional development and facilitate a coherent and organized

approach." He described this strategy for resolving the issue of staff development as a "blended solution" that provides sufficient direction for school administrators.

Chris

Issue: Earmarked Funding

Chris described the issue of earmarked funding for instruction and transportation as an issue within his jurisdiction. The conditions attached to government funding for school jurisdictions were perceived as problematic. Chris maintained that as a superintendent, he was experiencing increasingly more limitations placed on educational funding. He described the onerous task of securing AISI grants in excess of $660,000 and questioned the feasibility of such an endeavor. To secure AISI grants, the jurisdiction had spent approximately 20% of the budget for an entire project. Prior to this change in funding formulas in 1995, superintendents were permitted more latitude to spend funds at their discretion. The current educational milieu sets specific criteria for the disbursement of educational funding that constrain the administrative maneuverability of superintendents.

> *Earmarked funding is still with us. As an example, we're still getting earmarked funds for special needs kids, and the stronger the need, the more administration and identification that needs to be done. School systems are not being trusted to spend the money wisely.*

The conditions attached to the block funding grants have been further complicated by the percentage differential for teaching versus non-instructional staff. Chris indicated that the most recent offer for contract negotiations has identified a specific salary allowance

that is marginally higher than that for non-instructional staff. This offer represents a departure from past practice and sets the stage for contention between professional groups.

> *Klein really, I think, had created a new problem for us by saying teachers get 4% next year, and then so the question we have for the minister is, what about the 1,100 people in our system. What about the people who are not teachers? If we're getting 3, 3-1/2% general grant, and you've given 4% specifically for teachers, so there's a bit of an inequity there. What about our carpenters? What about our caretakers? And what about our secretaries? Are you saying that they don't get 4%, or they don't get 7-1/2% when you add it together? They get 3 or 3-1/2%. We've tended in the past to try to give them equal treatment in instructional and non-instructional ..., and this is the first time the government has diverted from that by targeting specific money to teachers only. It'll be interesting to see how that plays out.*

Resolution: Government Lobbying

Chris employed jurisdictional efforts to lobby the government to withdraw the funding constraints. He described the jurisdictional initiative that drafted and proposed resolutions to the Alberta School Boards' Association, which has directed the resolutions to the Learning Minister, who has the authority to create a policy change. This protocol has not successfully created change in AISI funding policy to date.

Issue: Bullying

Chris indicated that school violence in the form of bullying and general threats against students and the school has been perceived as an issue by educational

stakeholders since the Columbine shooting incident in Denver, Colorado and the school shooting in Taber, Alberta. Chris was not convinced that the actual school violence rate had increased; however, parental perceptions of school violence, exacerbated by mass media, were clearly an issue for his school jurisdiction.

Resolution: Support Safe and Caring School Initiatives

Chris reaffirmed the importance of supporting the programs currently offered in Alberta to address the issue of school violence, such as the Alberta Teachers' Association Safe and Caring School Initiatives (SACS).

> *There's the bullying, and the teasing. Those kinds of threats against schools, and the individual students seems to have been escalating. And so what are we going to do about it? How do we make our schools safer? What we've been doing is very actively supporting programs that have been put on by various groups like the Alberta Teachers' Association runs a program 'Safe and Caring Schools' so we've got that going and developing in many of our schools.*

The superintendent indicated the importance of corporate liaisons to offset the financing of an additional program entitled *Teasing and Bullying*. The program consists of a collaborative process involving key educational stakeholders to curb the spread of school violence. The program targets early-elementary-aged children to provide them with proactive coping strategies that students will internalize as they reach adulthood. Chris described a shift in parental attitudes toward the perception that schools were no longer safe places for their students.

Issue: Internet Threats

One of the current issues in the school jurisdiction involved threatening Internet messages. A student confided on-line with a friend about their frustration with peer bullying. The discussion included connotations of revenge-seeking behavior that the RCMP perceived as potentially dangerous.

> *We had one this past year where a student, in a chat room talking to a girl in Colorado said, 'Sometimes I get so frustrated with these two bullies in my school that I feel like shooting up my school.' That was picked up by the FBI, who relayed it to the RCMP, and in the middle of the night the RCMP showed up at this 14 year old kid's home. Before you knew it the world for that family was turned upside down. Of course it got out into the papers. Big public meetings were held with parents sending the message that the perpetrators be banned from school forever. It just escalated beyond reason.*

Resolution: Discipline Policy

The resolution of this issue resided in adherence to the jurisdictional discipline policy. Once it was determined that the alleged Internet threat was precipitated by an ongoing bullying scenario, the school jurisdiction's discipline policy was implemented. The consequences for bullying included a school suspension, which was subsequently appealed and heard before the board discipline committee. The end result included school expulsions for the bullying students.

> *Well, once we found out what they were doing, they were suspended from school, and brought before a hearing on the board discipline committee. Listening to the boys, and listening to their parents, the committee determined that these boys*

were an ongoing threat to students in the school, and expelled them for the remainder of the year. The parents chose to take their students to another school system and get them enrolled again, but that was their choice.

Issue: Small High School Equity

Chris indicated that small high school equity was an issue for his jurisdiction. Small high school equity refers to the limited course offerings characteristic of rural high schools. Smaller teaching populations make it increasingly difficult to offer specialist courses such as Physics and Chemistry.

Resolution: Teacher Diversification

Chris proposed a proactive strategy to hire multitalented teachers capable of teaching more than one subject area specialization. Chris also indicated that using this strategy was not always feasible and that a final resolution was the offering of correspondence courses.

Resolution: Virtual Schooling

Chris proposed that the issue of small high school inequity may be addressed with the advent of virtual education. *The Academy of Virtual Education*, recently operationalized in his jurisdiction, is currently addressing this issue. Teaching in real-time interactive video addresses the small high school inequity issue. Virtual schools are currently not fully operationalized with interactive video delivery. The advent of the Supernet, due out as early as September 2002 in some Alberta school jurisdictions, will provide students with this learning option.

One of the most promising things that we're working on now is our virtual school. It's called The Academy of Virtual Instruction, and we're now moving into the

high school level where kids can, in small schools, take on-line courses that they would not be able to take in their own school. That to me is going to be the way of the future for small high schools. We're not going to close down a school where it takes an hour and half to get to another high school, and so we have to deal with it in some way or another. The technology is there now, and the Minister has promised fibre to every school in the province to get high-speed two-way exchange. Within the next year or two we should be able to very easily offer almost real classroom time instruction in any subject that a student wants.

Issue: School Mergers and Closures

School closures and school mergers were issues in Chris' school jurisdiction. Increasingly low enrollments necessitated reviews for closure or possible merger with existing schools. The issue of school closures is fraught with politics, as communities are increasingly resistant to and suspicious of the process.

The problem with that whole area is that many of these small schools are so remote that closure is almost impossible because of ride times to get to other schools. And even where the ride times are not that long, it becomes a very political situation where a community sees the school closing as the community being killed.

Chris aptly described the political overtones associated with the school closures and mergers, "so these things, they're like land mines 'cause every time you start going down the road and looking at these things, you've got politics all over the place."

Resolution: Advisory Recommendations

Chris indicated that jurisdictional policy was addressing the issue of school closures. The review policy directs the board to be notified if a school's enrollment plunges below 50% capacity. The senior administrative team operates in an advisory capacity only and cannot close a school without the board's permission. Chris described jurisdictional strategies, such as school viability studies and meetings with concerned stakeholders, as current information gathering protocol. These strategies provide the superintendent with direction for recommendations on school closures. The politics of these contentious situations have become prevalent for declining rural enrollments are associated with school closures, which are perceived as tantamount to the demise of rural communities.

> *The government says, we'll give you money to do a study. Well, we did that in 1988, 1990, and in 1991, and we are just doing another study now. It's $20,000 to have a consultant look at it, but at some point the board is going to have to bite the bullet and make a decision one way or the other. As administrators we try to advise the board as best we can, and give them all the data, but in the end they're going to have to make the decision. We can't close schools, as administrators.*

Issue: Financial Management

Chris described the jurisdiction's efforts to streamline bureaucratic processes such as duplication of services between public school boards and community colleges. He identified the cost inefficiencies associated with the duplication of financial services among school jurisdictions.

We have a system with a 48 million-dollar budget. We have our own payroll department. We have our accounts payable. We have management information systems. Everything's in place, and it cost X dollars to have that service. The other local school systems have most of the same financial functions, plus the college has something similar. So why don't we merge it all together into one big finance department and have a more efficient system.

Resolution: Centralize Services

Chris described the committee known as "The Summit," whose mandate is to analyze existing jurisdictional inefficiencies. The Summit is comprised of representatives from the regional college board of governors and administrative members from the three school boards. To combat the high cost of service duplication among educational jurisdictions, the committee suggested a centralized model for services. The problem lies in the proverbial "siloistic" mentality among stakeholders.

And as soon as we start talking about that, everybody jumps into what I call the silo. They try to protect what they've got in their system. Even our system finance people don't want to lose what they have. It's the same with the other systems as well. So the silo mentality is something that needs to be overcome if we're going to move into a more efficient way of operating.

The Summit has hired an individual to explore the possibilities of providing a shared-services model and to make recommendations for streamlined educational systems. This process has resulted in varying levels of satisfaction: "It's fairly interesting watching the hackles go up on the backs of the necks of secretary treasurers when they think they might be losing a little of their empire."

Issue: Increased Administrative Time

Chris described a shift in emphasis to a school based decision-making model and school based budgeting resulting from the educational reforms, which have had a direct impact on school-based administration. The impact has resulted in an increased workload for school administrators.

> *There are so many things that are downloaded, like management information systems, student information systems. The government is making the world more complicated. Every student in the province is now a number in a data bank in government offices somewhere, in order to track that student and what he's doing. It creates a lot of paperwork, I think. It's escalating, and yes, they're not giving us the time to really deal with it properly. It creates an overload for everyone right from the teacher up.*

Resolution: Financial Support

Chris asserted that jurisdictional efforts were aimed at financially supporting the administrator's efforts to fulfill increased work obligations. Chris explained that school-based administrators consistently mentioned the lack of available time to properly address the demands of their increased workload.

> *They would like to, they like the school-based decision making and budgeting model, but they still feel that they don't have the time to do it properly. Financially, I'm trying to give them the time they need but the money is too tight.*

Issue: Catholic 4x4s

Chris described the formation of Catholic 4x4s as an issue in his jurisdiction. He identified the centralized funding model as the genesis of this issue. Essentially, the

problem is a funding issue for Catholic students who travel out of jurisdictional boundaries. The centralized funding model does not acknowledge these exogenous costs, creating funding tensions for neighboring school jurisdictions. In order to address this issue parents have voted to form Catholic 4x4 school jurisdictions to secure the government funding necessary to support transportation costs. The issue involves the animosity between the Catholic 4x4s and the non-Catholic jurisdictions who are unable to resolve the problems caused by the out-of-area travel arrangements:

> *But I've heard around Canmore, I guess there's quite the war going on between the Catholics and the Province and that Bill 16 is probably going to put it to rest, but there's a lot of worry that it's just going to escalate the problem, and so where that's going to go in the future is anybody's guess, but certainly it's becoming a pretty hot issue provincially.*

Resolution: Shared Services Model

Chris has attempted to resolve the potential problem by providing busing services to the Catholic schools within and surrounding his school jurisdiction. He summarized his shared services model to mitigate the proverbial "siloistic" mentality: "We get along well with our Catholic neighbors. We've worked out in an amicable way to provide buses to the Catholic schools. We don't need to be enemies. We're in the same business."

Issue: Special Needs Students

Chris discussed the exorbitant expense of delivering essential services to special needs children: "What we're faced with in rural education is lack of equity because of the high cost of services in rural areas." Sparsity and distance create a huge cost differential for special needs services between rural and urban school jurisdictions. The increased

costs to provide services such as speech, physiotherapy and psychological services are compounded because the current provincial funding does not recognize these overt discrepancies. Other costs include travel and tuition costs for special needs students requiring service from specialized institutions in urban centers.

Resolution: Government Lobbying

Chris indicated the need for government lobbying to secure additional funding to offset the enormous costs of specialist service provision for students in isolated communities. He explained that the duty of the jurisdiction is to notify the Learning Minister of the exorbitant costs of special needs servicing as compared to these costs in the urban model, on which budgeting seems to be based.

Chris explained that school jurisdictions, who are legally required to provide tuition costs for special needs students, have experienced a shortfall in funding as a result of this non budgeted item. He mentioned that jurisdictional precedence affected board decisions regarding special needs students. In other words, if a student in one jurisdiction successfully secures funding for travel and tuition costs for a specialized institution, then additional pressure may be placed on neighboring jurisdictions to consider similar requests.

Chris mentioned that the Ministry of Learning was well aware of this situation; however, proactive measures to resolve the problem have not been proposed.

> *So you're faced with rising expectations, particularly in this world today when special services are readily available in the urban centers. Parents want them, and we have to pay for them, so we have to somehow get through that. There are*

some situations where we send kids to a special school where we've paid up to $50,000 a year for services for that child, and their funding was maybe $20,000.

Issue: Foot and Mouth Disease

Chris described foot and mouth disease as a novel issue during his 26-year central office tenure. The controversy surrounded students who had traveled to Europe during the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. The local farmers were vexed, as they believed that student travel potentially jeopardized the Alberta beef industry.

I was saying to one of my deputies recently that this year we had one new issue that I'd never dealt with before. It was the issue of foot and mouth disease in England. We had school groups traveling at Easter over there, and farmers were telling us that we were murderers, and that we were going to destroy the beef industry in this province if we let those kids go. That was one new issue, which I had never dealt with before.

Resolution: Consultative Processing

Chris described a process of information gathering, prior to advising the board regarding student travel, as a means to resolve this issue. In this instance, the federal government had established a protocol to ameliorate the problems associated with travel.

Our response was to contact the experts in the federal government that controlled these types of issues. They informed us that the trips were safe as long as we followed their rules such as, dry cleaning and washing all belongings before returning to their rural communities, and not going near cattle for two weeks after their return. They were also supposed to stay away from direct contact with

infected areas while visiting Europe. There were other rules as well that were easy to follow.

The federal government officials assured Chris that thousands of travellers from Europe arrived in North America each day and were undertaking these simple measures. Chris resolved the issue by recommending to the board that trips continue as scheduled. Only one school cancelled because of parental concerns that the proposed measures were insufficient to adequately address the potential threat of infection.

Jack

Issue: Earmarked Funding

A major issue concerned earmarked funding for certificated staff. Past jurisdictional practice involved block-funding allotments for school boards to disperse as deemed appropriate. Recently, Alberta Learning placed limitations on funding allocation to address the specific issue of certificated staff increases, a move which represented a significant departure in funding practice.

I believe after the last election they indicated that they were going to put 4% for certificated staff [salary] increases into a separate envelope, and that should be used to address certificated staff increases in salaries and benefits. That was a major departure from anything that I've seen in the time I've been an administrator in this district.

Jack was concerned about the diminished capacity of the board to offer collective agreement settlements for teachers because of earmarked restrictions. He indicated that a separate 3.5% of government funding independent of the 4% was earmarked for such issues as class size reduction. The school board passed a motion for senior

administration to address the issue of class-size reduction by using the 3.5%. The contentious aspect of the motion involves the board's future ability to be able to offer teachers more than the 4% that Alberta Learning has earmarked for collective agreements.

> *The secretary treasurer was very concerned about if we spend that money on class size that we could be backing ourselves into a very difficult position in terms of reaching a wage settlement down the line, and it would restrict the number of choices that the board would have in it's negotiating stance.*

Resolution: Collaborative Efforts

Jack highlighted his collaborative strategies with the senior administration team and the school trustees. His senior administrative team members consisted of a deputy superintendent and associate superintendent of finance. This team projected future concerns for collective agreements and class sizes. He described the subsequent meeting with the school board to discuss the senior administration's concern over the limitations of earmarked funding and the future limitations on imminent collective agreements. Principals had also been consulted throughout the decision-making process.

> *The board listened to what we had to say, and then basically said, well, your recommendation is very general. We believe that we can pass this recommendation, although we want to take out any indications that we're dealing with the concept of the 4%, out of our guidelines, but we feel we can pass this, and then we hold you responsible, as the superintendent, for making sure that we don't get in trouble over it.*

Jack explained that this issue heightened tensions between Alberta Learning and the Alberta Teachers' Association. Jack maintained that given the current information, his senior administrative team was content with their consultative process and remain cautiously optimistic about their negotiation options for the future.

> *I should have tried to do something about that at that time more than what I did, but the information that I had at that time didn't indicate the kinds of concerns, at least to the same degree, as what we had when we actually went forward with a plan to implement that recommendation. As far as I can tell, from the comments that came from the principals when we talked about that, their feeling was, it's too bad this whole thing unfolded the way it did, but we sure buy the concerns that you're stating to us and how you were feeling, Jack, as the superintendent. So for the most part, I think that we have the right things happening out in the schools to keep our options open, but this is a major concern.*

Issue: Sabbatical Leaves

Jack described his school jurisdiction's sabbatical leave clause as cause for concern. A grievance had been filed by a teacher who challenged the interpretation of the annual leave quota required by the jurisdiction.

> *Well, the sabbatical leave clause has not changed for many years. For a period of time leaves were given. On occasion there were years when we didn't give anything, but then the financial aspect, or the financial picture changed for school jurisdictions and all of a sudden across the province fewer sabbatical leaves were being given to individuals to go back to university, or college, or whatever. In the past year, all of a sudden we find grievances coming forward in relation to those,*

that clause where a grievance might have been filed, like, four or five years ago and hadn't been, is now coming forward.

The grievance coincided with a board-granted funding for another teacher. This, according to Jack, was not a sabbatical leave but, rather, funding for professional development to lead an AISI reading recovery project. The required teaching commitment for the returning teacher was two years as opposed to a single year's commitment as was past practice.

The grievance was filed based on the interpretation of the collective agreement. The interpretation of the phrase "up to 2%" of the certificated staff will be granted sabbatical leaves was in dispute. Jack's interpretation was that the board could grant funding to as many as 2 % of the certificated staff but was not required to do so. In other words, the board had the discretion to grant these leaves based on the jurisdictional needs for such professional development. The superintendent and the board determined that the jurisdiction did not require the requested professional development proposed by the teacher, and therefore, they denied the request.

Resolution: Consultative Processing

Jack and his associate superintendent followed the collective agreement protocol for managing sabbatical leave requests. The protocol included a review and ranking of applications based on the jurisdiction's educational priorities. Jack recommended to the board that the application be denied based on the insufficient need for such professional development. The board concurred with the committee's recommendations.

The teacher grieved these recommendations. The grievance was to be reviewed by the Interpretation and Review Committee, consisting of two trustees and two Alberta

Teachers' Association Members. Finally, the grievance has ended up in arbitration where it is currently being reviewed and will be ruled on by April 2002. Consultation and collaboration with the Alberta School Boards' Association Legal Counsel were held before the arbitration hearing. The legal counsel has questioned witnesses regarding the application of sabbatical leaves during the ten years prior to this grievance.

Summary

Table 4.1 (p. 51) provides an overview of the issues identified by each of the research participants. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 (p. 52) identify and categorize single issues. The following summary will focus on the common threads highlighted by the participants (Table 4.1) as well as the single issues identified in Tables 4.2 and 4.3.

Equitable Education

A common issue that emerged concerned the perception of equitable education. A majority of the participants described their concern over the unequal treatment of small rural high schools. Participants were concerned with the discrepancy of course offerings in rural high school versus urban high schools. The specialist subjects commonly identified were Physics and Chemistry. The lack of sufficient course offerings was attributed to the dearth of qualified teachers available for appointment within the rural jurisdictions. Elementary generalists were not considered a problem as sufficient numbers of teachers seemed to be available to manage the curricula in an appropriate manner as perceived by stakeholders. Parents were cited as knowledgeable about the concessions that rural parents made when choosing remote communities; however, the superintendents felt that rural schools should be capable of offering at least a minimum

number of quality course offerings to high school students to facilitate the necessary preparation for entrance into post-secondary institutions.

Resolutions included a common reference to virtual education in current forms and anticipation for future technically superior forms to address rural high school inequity. Current forms of on-line technology involve a variety of learning platforms such as Web CT and Lotus Classroom. Superintendents indicated that the current methods address the issue of high school inequity and distance and sparsity in general; however, a common desire to maintain the status of the teacher emerged. In other words, superintendents prefer teachers to be present in classrooms and believe that technology remains a facilitative tool to support the provincial curricular needs. Superintendents were optimistic that the advent of the Supernet would address the problem of high school inequity. The possibility of real-time interactive instruction has the potential to decrease the constraints of remoteness by providing qualified teachers access to isolated students.

Funding Frameworks

Another central theme that emerged concerned the change in provincial funding frameworks as a result of the educational restructuring. Superintendents identified role changes for school trustees that resulted from the funding framework's restructuring, which left them unclear and tentative in their new role. The constraints of earmarked funding, resulting from educational reforms, resulted in the superintendents' perception of diminished spending discretion and lack of government trust.

One of the earmarked funding constraints identified placed limitations on the superintendent's ability to offer collective bargaining settlements. These constraints were a significant departure from past practice which gave superintendents a block grant to

disperse at their discretion rather than placing limitations on the amount of spending permitted for a certain education area.

Another specific result noted by a superintendent concerned the deterioration of professional development as jurisdictions moved towards site-based decision-making with educational restructuring. The result was inconsistent professional development that was having harmful effects on staff development.

Resolutions for these issues involving funding frameworks were conspicuously absent from initial interview transcripts, which indicate superintendents' perceived lack of control over this issue. Upon further probing, in additional interviews, superintendents suggested the need to lobby the government to lift earmarked funding constraints. A superintendent described the tabling of resolutions through the ASBA as a proactive strategy to pressure the Learning Minister to ease the funding limitations. Other issues identified elicited prompt suggestions for proactive strategies; however, funding frameworks appear to have resulted in limited suggestions for specific recourse and resolution.

Staffing

Staffing was the final common theme that emerged. The challenge of attracting and retaining quality personal was noted. Superintendents are interested in attracting high-quality teachers who are willing to make a commitment to their school and community for more than a one-year term. Communities were noted as being sensitive to the practice of the proverbial "revolving door" for newly appointed teachers:

I'm not sure it's going to be a really bleak thing, but I do think rural jurisdictions, particularly with the ones that are a little more remote from the central core,

we're going to continue to struggle a lot for stabilizing staffing. It's one thing to get people for a year, getting people to stay and settle in, and after a while communities get pretty sensitive to that.

Resolutions included financial assistance for teachers in the form of relocation allowances and bursaries for aspiring teachers. Additional financial compensation for one jurisdiction enabled teachers to achieve maximum pay scales in decreased time lines.

Another superintendent indicated the challenge of attracting teachers capable of teaching the specialist subjects at the high school level, such as Chemistry and Physics, a problem which resonates with the equitable education theme. Resolution included hiring teachers capable of instructing a variety of specialist subject areas and willing to travel to multiple sites. In addition, school sites were chosen that would facilitate reasonable travel times between instructional episodes.

Single Issues

Seventeen of the 23 issues identified by the participants were single item issues. In other words, only a single participant reported the issue. These issues have been identified and represented in Table 4.2. Upon further analysis, the researcher categorized the single issues into the following four themes (Table 4.3): Administration, Governance, Policy and Society. A further discussion of these themes as compared to the literature is presented in Chapter 6.

The next chapter identifies the findings on each participant's responses to the sub-questions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the themes that emerged from these responses.

Chapter 5

Sub-Question Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings involving the following sub-questions:

1. How has provincial funding affected the quality of Alberta education?
2. What strategies are used to maintain an effective working relationship with the school board and other educational stakeholders?
3. Has the role of the superintendent been defined clearly enough so that all educational stakeholders have a sense of the CEOs' responsibilities?
4. What jurisdictional concerns, if any, have arisen since the educational reforms of the 1990s?
5. What role does employee delegation play in the management of a school jurisdiction?
6. Is the superintendent viewed as a chief executive officer or a chief academic officer?
7. What are the future challenges of the superintendency?

The following are the findings presented by the six research participants in response to each one of the sub-questions. Table 5.1 (p. 105) provides a summary of the emergent themes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the themes that emerged from responses to the sub-questions.

Table 5.1

Summary of Sub-Question Emergent Themes

SQ 1	SQ 2	SQ 3	SQ 4	SQ 5	SQ 6	SQ 7
Additional Funding	Politics	Dual Reporting Role	Amalgamation	Power	CEO Focus	Entrepreneurial
Earmarked Funding	Relationship Building	Role Ambiguity	Governance			Non Educator Influence
Increased Funding			Role Change			Trusteeship
			Stakeholder Accountability			
			Student Funding			

Notes:
SQ = sub-question

1. How has provincial funding affected the quality of Alberta education?

John

John reported that provincial funding had effected student transportation within his jurisdiction. He stated that the new funding structure imposed constraints on the schools that students could attend.

> *What do we want for the kids in this division? That's a huge role. That's really long term. With this new funding structure, the role of transportation, because it really limits where people can go and choice becomes such a big factor we get asked to transport our kids to non-jurisdictional schools. You have to say no sometimes because it becomes a liability of your school.*

He described the desire to collaborate with neighboring jurisdictional; however, funding limitations have curbed this practice.

Harvey

Harvey described the amalgamation of school boards under the auspices of educational restructuring as a positive move toward improving Alberta education. Harvey reported the amalgamation initiative as a "wonderful step," which

> *without saying so, did away with the county system and it put us together into these larger units where people were elected as school board trustees with the mandate to govern public education, and that's been a wonderful change. The other positive change, aside from the idea of having greater economies of scale with larger school divisions, is a school board that's selected solely for the purpose of governing public education.*

Harvey identified centralized funding as a positive change resulting from the amalgamation of the school jurisdictions. He described the inequity of funding that existed prior to restructuring and that was based on local taxation practice.

> *Pre-regionalization local school boards collected their own taxes, so you would have a region like the County of Strathcona, the city of Sherwood Park, technically it is a hamlet, not a city, believe it or not because its within a county, but with refinery row was exceedingly tax rich. Black Gold school division had the Genesee power plants, international airport, Nisku industrial park, and a myriad of oil petrol industry based installations across that were tax rich. You move out a little further, and particularly in the south and east, you had vast expanses of prairie that had nothing on them. You'd have a cattle ranch of 2,500 acres, and, yeah, they'd pay their taxes, but I mean, you look at the differential and the ability to generate taxation revenue and is it was, oh, it was wide.*

Harvey described Alberta Learning's inability to acknowledge and account for accumulated reserve funds as problematic. Those boards with large reserve funds were able to manage despite the change in funding formula, but those lacking reserves experienced funding shortfalls.

Mathew

Mathew described a crucial aspect of the superintendency as follows: "part of the job of superintendent is to get more money." He described himself and his jurisdiction as entrepreneurial. He identified the need for funding in non-traditional forms for such things as teacher recruitment rather than class size reduction, which was not a concern for the jurisdiction.

Mathew identified the importance of funding and the potential of the development of distance-learning venues such as the Supernet to have positive implications for future student learning. He described the necessity of the Supernet's development in order to address the issue of small high school inequity.

> *We have a million dollars committed to us, although not in writing, from the department of learning and the department of infrastructure to supply us the money for Mpeg 2 suites in the school, since the, as I said, it's approximately a million dollars. Unfortunately the Mpeg 2 suites are a waste of time unless you have enough bandwidth. Our plan right now is to put 100 mgs into each high school dedicated to distance delivery of education. Further, if we have Supernet and Mpeg 2 we don't necessarily have one of our teachers do it. We could take a student at the University of Alberta who is a math expert, or something like that, and ask that person to teach math 31, or some course such as that, from the*

University of Alberta being delivered in our jurisdiction, and we would hire that person as a part time teacher.

Don

Don described funding frameworks as a jurisdictional issue. He reported the problems associated with the per capita or per student funding model that resulted from the restructuring of Alberta education. The new system allowed for sparsity and distance as well; however, according to Don, this system has not completely addressed the need for additional funding and has increased tension between urban and rural schools as the demands to share limited resources have continued. Hence, limited funding has adversely affected the quality of rural education.

Chris

Chris alluded to earmarked funding as a predominant issue within his jurisdiction. Earmarked funding has diminished the superintendent's ability to address pressing issues. Instead, funding has been directed towards government priority areas.

Another earmarked funding issue concerned the negotiation of new collective agreements. The government has capped teachers' wage increases to 4 % and has imposed constraints on the remaining 3.5% to address class-size issues. Any resulting strike will have deleterious effects on the quality of Alberta education. Even a rotational strike would inevitably lead to disruptions in instructional service and a decrease in the quality of education for the students of Alberta.

That's just for last year. Now this coming year the government has come up with something new. They've put in 4% for teachers' salaries, plus our general grants are 3.5%. The teachers are looking at it and saying, well, that adds up to 7.5% so

that's what they should get next fall. The government says no, 4% is for the teachers, 3.5% is creating more classrooms, and making smaller classes. Tell that to the teachers when they're negotiating a contract, so that's going to be a big fight next year. And what the teachers are looking for is double digits. Like a lot of them, probably 10 or 11% a year, so what we're faced with is grants that will not support that. It's going to be a big fight, unless the government decides to come through with more money.

Jack

Jack described earmarked funding as an issue for his jurisdiction. He viewed these constraints as limiting the superintendents' ability to settle collective agreements. This problem would harm student learning, given the inevitability of a teacher's strike. Earmarked funding also sets the senior administration and Alberta Learning at odds with one another. Clearly, the government viewed class size as the predominant issue whereas the superintendent was concerned with resolving collective agreements.

2. What strategies are used to maintain an effective working relationship with the school board and other educational stakeholders?

John

John reported the need for collaborative efforts with school trustees; however, his commentary focused on the current need to maintain close relationships with school councils, particularly with school council chairs. He described the specific strategies used to maintain a positive working relationship with the school council chairs:

What we do is three times a year we have the school council chairs attend with the board and then we provide dinner. Two of them address, well one of them addresses our results, when we get our results in the Fall we like to share in terms of insights, this is what we achieved, this is what we did financially, and share that information so they have that knowledge. Then in our budgeting process, which begins in about February, our goals are three-year planning. We come away from preliminary planning with the board and asked the school council chairs again to see if they agreed with this direction and then the third one would once we put dollars towards that direction, we ask them to come in again and seek their input. See if they agree with how we've allocated our dollars and then get some understanding too as to what they can expect in their schools. They are major stakeholders because they sort of represent the parents and the communities, the community at large of course because of structures, school councils, they have a member on the school council.

John described the importance of liaisons with a variety of educational stakeholders beyond the boundaries of traditional school boards and parents. He also described the importance of working with special businesses and the Chamber of Commerce.

John reported the challenge of establishing working relationships with teachers who had endured a forced transfer. A specific strategy used to resolve the negative perceptions associated with teacher transfer was to provide professional development.

We do lots of professional development type of activities, we put people together from all different backgrounds, schools and locations, so we had a pretty

concerted effort I think again, all of our Covey training we did when getting together and really talking about what things make you effective and seeking first to understand and we're very pleased with the results so far. Time will always be a factor with people.

Harvey

Harvey linked the establishment and maintenance of working relationships to the political role of the superintendency. He described the importance of fostering relationships with educational stakeholders:

Relationship are the hub of the universe, and in today's world of administration, if you are not cut out of the cloth that you're a collaborator and a co-operator and a manager who manages by consensus and in a democratic manner you're doomed. You're absolutely doomed to failure because, number one, our staff wouldn't put up with it.

Harvey provided broad strategies for dealing with the many education stakeholders. He offered the following caveat regarding specific strategies:

You've got to understand where we are, what they want, what their needs are, and then try to please them, try and meet them there somehow, and for those that you know you're not going to please, have strategies to try and ameliorate their disappointments so that you still keep them as a meaningful part of that team. And ameliorating that disappointment is not always easy.

Despite their best efforts to resolve problems, superintendents were inevitably challenged by stakeholders displeased with the decision-making process. Harvey expressed his fundamental tenet for decision making and relationship development:

I'm skilled at managing politics, where I would draw the line, and where I would sacrifice my career is if kids were to be compromised because I believe that's what I'm here for at the end of the day. I think it's rare that it would ever come to that because I think with most human beings be they school trustees, teachers, parents or whoever, that the vast majority, if they know how to generate relationships, establish and maintain relationships with them, if we listen, if we understand them, meet them half way, that most people, the vast majority want the best for everyone, especially for our kids, let's get everyone involved.

Mathew

Mathew described the importance of politics in his role as superintendent. He indicated that he had inherited the role of establishing relationships because of his lengthy tenure as superintendent and thorough knowledge of stakeholder concerns.

Unfortunately you need a level of continuity and time to be in a place to develop the relationships with the politicos and with people like the party to be effective, and I am the longest serving person including board members there, so I mean, the job has just fallen to me, the board is quite happy with this.

Mathew identified the pivotal role of establishing and fostering relationships with a myriad of stakeholders. He described the essence of maintaining effective working relationships was to balance power by establishing strategic alliances.

You have to create relationships with your labor forces. You have to create all sorts of relationships to make the thing function. You have to develop partnerships with the University of Alberta, or other places like the University of Alberta. This learning suite thing that we're putting together, as I mentioned

earlier with Craig, I spent some time with Larry Beauchamp, the Dean, on that one, and he said, go for it, we like to see this sort of thing happening. We make sure that the bureaucrats understand that we're not talking a K-12, when we're doing that we're also talking university and expanding the concepts of pedagogy. While these things all have good objectives in themselves, each one of those in making sure that the knowledge is out there is very much a political type of activity.

Don

Don described the role of the superintendent as inherently political in regards to maintaining working relationships with the variety of educational stakeholders.

I think in a lot of respects it's kind of facilitation, the words I jotted down on my note here were facilitation, brokerage and mediation. Trying to help the elected officials and the stakeholders find some, whatever balanced solutions, or some kind of mutually acceptable compromises on what'll work for them. And I think that the interactions involved in doing those kind of things with elected officials as the decision makers is, like I said, it's sort of inherently political.

He used "balance" in reference to solutions that would be mutually acceptable to all stakeholders. Tension permeated a governance structure with two employers with divergent agendas.

Chris

Chris elaborated on strategies to foster positive relationships with school board members. He identified the importance of being perceived as neutral when interacting with them.

You have to try to be neutral as much as possible. I've seen cases where superintendents will side with a couple of strong board members and it becomes obvious to the rest of the board. That superintendent doesn't last very long. All it takes is one of those strong board members to change sides on an issue and the vultures will be at the superintendent just like that.

He described the necessity of being skilled at listening to all sides of a particular issue while maintaining a positive disposition.

If you can build a climate where you're seen as giving advice but remaining neutral as much as you can in terms of taking sides, then it tends to work out. That's part of the political part of it, I guess. I'm always trying to cultivate good relationships with all the board members, even the ones that I knew didn't like me because they thought I was trying to close the school in their area, or something like that, and try to remain positive, and it's not always easy. But you look for ways of being positive as you can, and so you're walking a bit of a tightrope with them.

Chris concluded his discourse regarding establishing relationships with some general considerations about what a superintendent should heed as potentially contentious issues.

And when you get into a situation where you could be walking into a landmine where you personally might get attacked by one faction or another, look for a way to extricate yourself without it becoming too obvious.

Jack

Jack described the importance of the political aspect of establishing relationships with stakeholders groups within a volatile education milieu. He reported that stakeholders were less cohesive than in the past.

> *What I mean by that is they seem to have different priorities, and consequently the political actions that you need to take in having a school district operate become much more complicated.*

Jack described the parental stakeholder group as noticeably different in the recent past. He described parents as more informed regarding their rights and understanding of the protocols necessary to achieve personal agendas.

> *The changes in education over the last five to ten years the stakeholder groups want to have more influence over the decisions that are being made, and often will be coming from very different viewpoints in regard to the best way to achieve the best kind of education for the children of the district.*

Jack concluded with the assertion that his role has become increasingly complicated and political.

3. Has the role of the superintendent been defined clearly enough so that all stakeholders have a sense of the CEO's responsibilities?

John

John reported that role definition was an issue for the superintendency within Alberta. He described the potential for tension between the government and school boards due to role ambiguity: "It's a good question and it's certainly an issue as we met

with CASS and other executives when we find that there are difficulties between boards and superintendents it's almost invariably because the role hadn't been clearly defined." He mentioned that the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) and Alberta School Boards' Association (ASBA) were interested in providing direction for this issue in the form of future professional development.

> *Yes, it's an initiative, and for the first time I think that again at least in rural boards they finally have a clear idea who is the CEO, that it is able to define that role. Previously though it hasn't been clearly defined just as we sit and watch some of our colleagues with problems is that you know you'd better define the role and then people know, it's just when it gets clouded and people are trying to do each others jobs that issues arise I think.*

Harvey

Harvey perceived the role of the superintendent, defined by the government, to be deliberately vague.

> *There is mild reference to our role in the school act legislation. There's further reference to your role in regulations pertaining to that, but in terms of really clarifying what our job expectations are, and job descriptions are, no not from the government. I think that's probably deliberate because they want to leave that more up to the other boss.*

His explanation for this role vagueness was that the government wants to permit school boards to have an input regarding the superintendent's role. Harvey believed his role was clearly defined by his school jurisdiction, with 12 to 15 specific criteria identified.

Harvey identified the importance of the superintendent's role in networking with partnering organizations. He described the necessity of meeting regularly with the leadership circle to synergize policy and devise problem-solving strategies.

> *In our division we call it human services providers, and what we call it is a leadership circle, and we call it the human services leadership circle, and that, the CEO from health authority, the child family services authority, the inspector from the RCMP detachment, we try to get the municipal heads out. We think that that would be useful if the municipalities would come and sit and listen and understand, and it might help them with their policies to synergize better with it. But the other people, for example AADAC, alcohol and drug abuse commission, dependable and regularly there. Social services, they take a lead. They chair, co-chaired by the health authority, and there's three school divisions that are involved within this particular health/social service region. The superintendents are regularly present, or their designate, and that's been a wonderful thing and I think that needs to be a part of a superintendent's job description, becoming more critical as time goes on.*

Harvey indicated that these cooperative initiatives were a departure from past independent practices involving limited community collaboration.

> *So I can't say enough about that kind of co-operation, and it has helped our school division. The additional support that we've gotten for our staff, and students, and families has been gargantuan compared to the bad old days, or the good old days when things were going quite well in education but far be it that we*

would, social service, child welfare workers were usually seen as the enemy, and they perceive teachers as the enemy.

Mathew

Mathew believed that his role as chief executive officer was clear to his jurisdictional stakeholders but was unclear to Alberta Learning and other jurisdictions. The misunderstanding with external stakeholders such as Alberta Learning and other jurisdictions resulted from inexperience with the Carver model for board operating procedures.

Under our policy the role of the CEO is clear to everyone except the Department and other jurisdictions. Industry, parents, staff and suppliers know or learn quickly. The problem with the department and other jurisdictions is that they do not understand that we use a business model. Our ability to make decisions and cause action quickly is not in their reality and because most Sups want to pass the responsibility on to the board and don't want our freedom and the attached accountability.

Mathew used business and corporate terminology deliberately during his interview. He viewed himself as the chief executive officer charged with the management of a school jurisdiction:

The superintendent is a CEO of a major corporation. My corporation spends in excess of $25 million a year, and in a good year it's in excess of $40 million a year, and even though our job, and our product is the education of those children, my role it is not being a teacher, and not being the super teacher. I am not the principle teacher of the jurisdiction. I am the superintendent, I am the CEO. Our

board policy doesn't even refer to me as a superintendent, it refers to me as the CEO. I have two assistant superintendents that work like heck to make sure that there are good education programs going on.

Don

Don believed that educational restructuring had contributed to the ambiguity of the superintendent's role:

But it is pretty ambiguous right now. And again, I think one of the things that the restructuring did was increase that ambiguity. Partly the sort of joint accountability mattered to the board and to the minister, or to the deputy minister, partly the envelope funding that the organization you're heading up, it's easier to define the responsibilities and the needs than to realign the resources to respond to them sometimes.

Don noted that the dual reporting role had undermined the kind of clear understanding that is necessary for effective leadership: "I don't think for clear understanding and effective strategic leadership, which presumably is what the chief executives are about we've got an environment that kind of undermines that." He reported that the stakeholder often defined the superintendents' role, which held different meaning for each group depending on their interests. He described the potential for the dual reporting role to be problematic for superintendents but had not experienced any problems with it, because of the uniqueness of his position:

I was in the job under a contract that was established under the previous arrangement, kind of in the grandfather crowd, so I'm not in a situation where at the end of five years whether or not I'd carry on in this job is subject to somebody

in the ministry checking off and saying, okay, we agree, carry on kind of thing. But that's changing over time, and it's not going to be all that long before all the superintendents are in that situation of you're the chief executive officer for the board and you've got to satisfy the board and take care of their needs, but at the same time when it's contract renewal time, somebody in a senior position in the ministry is going to have an opportunity to look at that and say, you know, yes, we're satisfied with that this person has been properly accountable to us or we don't like what we see, so we're not going to concur with a renewal.

Chris

Chris felt that a good internal understanding of his role as superintendent existed within his jurisdiction. He mentioned the propensity for conflict when the line between senior administration and school trustee became blurred. He also stated that over the course of his senior administrative tenure, his rapport with the board had been satisfactory. However, when new board members were elected or a board member had a specific political agenda, the lines between roles were sometimes breached.

Chris described a specific strategy used in the past to resolve this problem. School board trustees and senior administrators participated in a retreat in order to review specific scenarios concerning role responsibilities to clarify expectations and provide for clearer understanding of roles. Typically, a hired consultant, perceived as neutral by the stakeholders, facilitated such a retreat.

Jack

Jack expressed his perception of the problem with role clarity:

> *I don't believe the role of the superintendent has been clearly defined. It puts the superintendent in a very difficult position. You know, who do you attend to? How much do you attend to who? The minute that you have two masters, you know, and the masters don't agree, then I think you're in difficult straits.*

Jack explained that the dual reporting responsibilities of the superintendent could be contentious when the two stakeholders disagreed on a particular issue. The disagreement inevitably led to tension as to the direction a superintendent should take in the resolution of an issue:

> *What does the superintendent do when the school board, and Alberta Learning, and the Minister of Education disagree on an issue where the superintendent is expected to take action? Let me give you an example of one that might be there. School board does not believe that achievement tests scores are a good indicator of student learning. Alberta Learning believes that it is. Alberta Learning indicates to the superintendent that we believe your test scores in a particular area at a particular grade level need to improve, something's wrong. School board believes that the superintendent should be putting efforts into increasing the tolerant understanding of students for one another. And this is not part of the achievement testing program. Consequently there's a pull on the superintendent as to where the priority should go.*

4. What jurisdictional concerns, if any, have arisen since the educational reforms of the 1990s?

John

John noted the tension created as a result of regionalization, and commented on the resulting conflict and unease:

> *I mean when the reforms happened there were two choices: there was amalgamation where a friendly merger versus regionalization which was, we were regionalized into two counties that had little in common other than sharing one boarder, was a huge issue for us a number of years and until actually the players moved on, including the superintendent and the entire board.*

John described the challenge of attempting to bring together a cohesive working unit whose members had few similarities.

> *A huge issue was how do you bring all these people together, teachers who aren't willing to deal with each other because the structure was such that a certain county and all of their related teachers conventions were going south or to a major urban center where another county was going towards a different community, they had little in common.*

John reported that the superintendent's role was clarified as a result of the educational reforms. He maintained that the former educational organizational structure under the county system distorted this role and that the organizational chart made for confusion over who was in charge:

> *Yes, I think it really did, I don't think it was well defined before, it sort, if I remember before, in our county, which was the county that I was in, that the*

organizational chart had all sorts of other people on there because it was debatable whether they should have had a co-CEO and there was county commissioner and a superintendent sort of together, sort of a dual role. So it never was clear to people who really was in control. The same with the comptroller treasurer, comptroller for the county side and also the treasurer so the expenses were there and sort of divided them according to how they wanted to. The role has become clearer, having one CEO it has cleared it up.

Harvey

Harvey described the amalgamation of school jurisdictions as a positive event. He believed that current governance was more education-friendly: "The other positive change in, aside from the idea of having greater economies of scale with larger school divisions and the school boards that's selected solely for the purpose of governing public education." Harvey reported that the school boards were now more focused on educational agendas rather than being preoccupied with numerous other concerns ranging from roads, gravel, culverts, bridges and agriculture.

Harvey was concerned with the inequity of centralized funding. He felt that corporate pooling failed to recognize the large pre-amalgamation reserve funds that several jurisdictions maintained.

So, after regionalization and the corporate pooling of the funding, we also went into a bit of a nosedive in terms of public funding for education. The era of the great reforms, we disaffectionately refer to it as, and those boards that had the fat of the land, the reserves, could live off of those reverses for five years, and many of them did, and sort of maintained, whereas those of us that didn't just really

struggled. There was one year here three years ago we had to cut 30 staff in order to maintain our operation, and I mean, that can't help but hurt. We had to reduce programs. We had to increase class sizes such that it was not uncommon to have elementary classes in excess, well in excess of 30 kids.

Another concern was the increased stakeholder demands for accountability: "The politics of the more well educated, articulate and demanding parent public, that was clearly enhanced after the era of the great reforms."

Another concern was the increased time needed to address administrative funding shortages:

So, an administrative envelope was determined within the funding framework that said about, between 4% and 6% of your budget will be administration, and that's all. You're not allowed to have more. That really meant a wholesale reduction in the kind of instructional support positions that we used to have.

Harvey described the dramatic increase in the senior administration's workload because of the fewer personnel.

Mathew

Mathew believed that the reforms, especially amalgamation, were a positive step for public education within Alberta. He identified the cost-saving benefits associated with amalgamation.

I look at one of our neighboring jurisdictions, one of the Catholic ones obviously, it was a dinky little jurisdiction. It was just a small jurisdiction itself. Now as you go up to another community and I'm not exactly sure their boundaries, but now it's big enough that it's an administrative unit that makes some sense. When it

was little, here they were hiring a superintendent paying a fairly good wage, and all the infrastructure to maintain that, and servicing a thousand kids.

Mathew indicated that his jurisdiction was not regionalized during the educational reforms and that his role as superintendent was largely unaffected. He occasionally acted as an advisor on policy issues to neighboring restructured jurisdictions.

No, we were not regionalized. It did change slightly in relationship to other jurisdictions because we were stable. Other jurisdictions would depend on us for things, to make sure things were done. You know, if you were busily trying to reinvent your governance structure, you don't really have a lot of time to look at solving other types of problems, so a lot of jurisdictions would contact us and say, how are you doing this? And we would just deliver our stuff to them and help them through some of those problems.

Don

Don described his diminished capacity to respond both financially and operationally as a result of the educational reforms. The provincial financial constraints limited his administrative behavior. Don indicated that his role morphed from that of "advocate for public education to a broker-type role." He believed that fewer superintendents were spearheading issues than was previously the case.

When I look around the province at my colleagues, I don't see superintendents in the, you know, 1999, 2000, 2001 sort of leading on issues the same way that I saw them doing that in 1989 or '90, or '91. There's more of a, how do we work it within the constraints that are now structured around us and upon us.

Chris

Chris identified several concerns regarding educational reforms, such as identifying the 5% wage rollback as being particularly "distasteful for everyone." Chris described the reticence of some former school jurisdictions to amalgamate. Negative connotations were associated with the perception of a forced merger by the Minister of Learning, which prevented a seamless transition into the newly amalgamated school jurisdictions. Chris mentioned some schools' and communities' isolation, which resulted from the jurisdictional reorganization. He also stated the need to address the problem of inconsistent policies that had resulted from amalgamation, and also to address their profound implications for leaves and seniority issues in collective agreements. In addition, he mentioned the need to address policy issues to such non-instructional unions such as the CUPE teamsters. He described the challenge of ensuring perceptions of equity between instructional and non-instructional unions through policy redrafting for such contentious issues as wages and benefits. Finally, Chris also described the contention associated with policy redrafting and contract agreements.

Jack

Jack described his jurisdiction's concerns about the religious designation prior to the educational reforms. He alluded to the unique nature of his jurisdiction, which had been formed as a religious minority existing among a denominational majority.

> *Shortly after the district formed, the religious minority in the community were concerned that they would have schools that did not have Catholicity as a major component of them because of their religious affiliations at the time. And under*

the school act, they were able to form a separate school district of another denomination.

Prior to the reforms there were talks with the school trustees about changing the designation of the school jurisdiction to reflect the non-denominational approach to education that existed within it. The educational reforms of the 1990s diminished the importance of the religious issue because of the new emphasis on educational funding. Superintendents became more interested in attracting students, for funding was tied to student enrollment.

Then what occurred was, of course, the reforms that occurred in the mid '90's, in particular the buck follows the kid, and all of a sudden all of the school districts, public school districts in the province, and separate, and private schools, for that matter, were starting to try and attract kids, and the religious issue became less of a concern, and the enrollment issue became more of a concern, and things started to change.

The perceived need to change the name of the school jurisdiction was diminished. Jack described the continuing misunderstanding over the jurisdictional name; however, he perceived constitutional benefits in remaining a separate school jurisdiction:

And of course, in our case, when we view this, we say, we believe we have some rights right now constitutionally that we would be giving up if we agree to switch designations now. So although we have difficulty with the name, in terms of people moving into the city, we also have difficulty with giving up constitutional rights. So that's a major jurisdictional concern that we deal with, which might be a little different than anybody else in the province.

5. What role does employee delegation play in the management of the school jurisdiction?

John

John described the challenge of leading from a distance, which was a reality within a rural school jurisdiction. He spoke of the need to be able to motivate his colleagues to work collaboratively.

> *It's really about bringing people together and having the tough conversations about what you are doing and taking the opportunities to reinforce what you believe in, being knowledgeable of each school and community, being fair and listening to staff. But really it's that ability, the power lies in the ability to get everyone to work together, to work to a common goal.*

John asserted that power and delegation were not synonymous with an authoritarian approach, which could not produce the desired outcomes:

> *I think that the concept of power, you can't be really an authoritarian power because you are leading from a distance, people can simply say yes when they see you and then go off and do their own thing.*

Harvey

Harvey stressed the need to empower colleagues to effectively lead a school jurisdiction. He alluded to the inherent problems in a military model of command-style delegation, in which orders are given and carried out without question.

> *I'll start my discourse by saying, you have none unless you give it away. And my entire philosophy of power and authority is underpinned by that belief, and again it goes back to comments I made earlier about the military model of authority*

where I command and you do. It's gone. And anybody that tries to make it work today is going to fail, or do irreparable harm to their operation and themselves. In terms of power and authority, it has to exist, the buck has to stop somewhere.

Harvey articulated his vision of governance and politics while discussing his views of delegation and power. He served in only an advisory role for governance and dealing with board politics, but held a specific view of his role for jurisdictional administration. He indicated the need to establish a lead role administrative decision-making for the school jurisdiction. He also reported his disdain of trustee interference with administrative decisions.

They've made a policy, they've established a philosophy of operation, or they've done it jointly with all of us, but when it comes to administration I want them [trustees] out of it. And that is a problem in Alberta in that there are many trustees, particularly from the old rural county order that are used to dabbling, having their fingers in the administrative pie.

Harvey's understanding of power and delegation revealed that he also understood the importance of leadership style. His perception of his role "recalled the servant leader model" articulated in Greenleaf's, *Servant Leadership* (1991):

Through being the servant was being the leader that was sustaining and nurturing that group and giving it direction through delegation, through respect, through listening, through a gentle sculpting of someone's view that may not be consistent with the mission and vision of the school jurisdiction, and in fact to be gently sculpted they become a player, and that's all back from behind the scene.

Harvey's belief regarding the purpose of power and delegation was evident in his understanding of "success." He mentioned that the purpose of his position was to create success for his staff and stakeholders. He did so by using a collaborative approach that instilled a common focus and provided opportunities for stakeholders to lead.

> *I'm motivated because I think I'm doing a greater good for humanity, and I love to see people succeed. So if we, as superintendents, use our power to make other people succeed then we've won. Teachers, parents, trustees, students, people, principals the whole works, I think that's what it's about, that's my job every day is inspire those people, shape and help mold them, listen to them, learn to understand them, pull them together into a team with common focus, and let them go. Guide and monitor, correct when you have to.*

Mathew

Mathew embraced his role as a chief executive officer rather than as a superintendent of schools. "I'm not in charge of that, I'm the CEO. I look after fund raising and the liaisons," he replied when questioned about instructional issues. He confirmed that his assistant superintendents were delegated with specific responsibilities and charged with what he referred to as the "educational business of the jurisdiction" while his role was to deal with the corporate interests. Mathew was satisfied with his delegation of authority to his senior administrative team and remarked that it enabled him to perform his role optimally and ensured trust among his colleagues. The delegation of authority to the assistant superintendents had implications for travel time, commonly referred to as "windshield time." Mathew indicated that to adequately perform their

administrative duties, the assistant superintendents required the services of a jurisdictional vehicle to travel to educational sites.

Don

Don described the importance of leadership and power as the capacity to influence others' decisions.

> *From time to time in order to do what needs to be done in a leadership role you have to do things that draw from that in this process of influencing others' decisions in the direction that you think they need to go, it's kind of this dynamic balance of you do things in the role, and the way you do the role that contribute to your credibility standing or your stock of credibility within the organization, and then in order to exercise power you draw from that balance to shape decisions.*

His understanding of the capacity to influence others, however, did not imply an authoritative approach in order to achieve the desired outcomes:

> *I think generally that stock of credibility approach, facilitative strategies tend to enhance it and directive strategies tend to diminish it and so you try and facilitate and empower and encourage and coach and let those kind of terms, as much as you can, and you try not to be prescriptive and directive more than you have to be.*

Don articulated the need for the jurisdiction to have an organizational vision in order to provide a sense of direction and prioritize issues for all concerned stakeholders:

> *Peter Lougheed was talking about running the government, and you know he said, you can't just deal with the big strategic form, big picture issues, you also have to pay attention to the operational details, but if you get mired in either one of those,*

your effect, your organizations effectiveness is going to start to deteriorate, and I think there's some wisdom in that for, you know, a public organization like a school jurisdiction as well, that the superintendent has to sort of cover the big picture and here and now, short term and intermediate to long term. And then I think the other thing is you kind of have to flex to where the issues of the moment are. Sometimes you got to spend a lot of time on here and now personnel considerations because something has gone bad.

Don also articulated the need to sense the opportune moment to either engage in activities or to delegate responsibilities:

Other times you can pretty much delegate all that away and focus a lot of energy on long term planning, but as soon as you start doing too much of one thing and excluding other aspects, and this is again back to the general management, you start excluding certain aspects that you just never deal with them anymore, that's going, at some point that's going to start to become unproductive, I think.

Chris

Chris described his perception of educational projects. Typically, he developed his ideas and then conveyed them to the senior administrative team before he delegated responsibilities:

I was talking about that with one of my senior officers the other day, and he said that what he sees in me is that I have a certain philosophy but that he believes that, once I've developed a concept in my mind about something new, I will assign the responsibilities. Then I'll get out of the way and let them tie into it.

He asserted that the process of delegation implied a sense of trust and shared power.

He described decision-making not as a solitary practice but, rather, as a process of collaboration among senior administrators.

> *To me it's collaborative. Although I do make decisions, there's no doubt about that, we make lots of decisions, I share the power with my deputies. They all have the responsibility to make decisions in their areas, and I trust them. That trust is important.*

He indicated that potential problems might ensue for a superintendent who did not trust their senior administrative team.

Jack

Jack believed that delegation was a key component in his role. He identified three specific criteria for delegation:

1. Expertise--Jack's perception of a person's strengths was a determining factor in his delegation of assigned tasks.
2. Quantity of work--Jack used delegation in order to accomplish the numerous assigned tasks. He indicated that completing all assigned tasks was physically impossible without delegating a significant portion of them to his senior administrative team.
3. Interest--Jack described interest as the most important factor in determining delegation of tasks. For example, I noticed during my field experience placement with Jack that the administrative assistant indicated a personal interest in the jurisdictional teacher mentorship program. He sensed her interest and delegated to her the task of organizing and implementing this initiative.

Jack mentioned the highly competent nature of his senior administrative team and that he often delegated significant assignments based on the above criteria. He indicated that

delegation provided the potential for increased productivity from colleagues, especially if the senior administrators were particularly interested in a task. The superintendent's support often took the form of funding and mentorship for such projects. Undesirable tasks were managed by using a team approach that enabled the superintendent and the senior administrators to eliminate the perception that an individual team member was being required to perform such assignments.

6. Is the superintendent viewed as a chief executive officer or a chief academic officer?

John

John described the need for both principals and superintendents to have effective management skills. He was leery of administrators being too concerned with managerial minutia and favored "leadership" as opposed to "management."

> *So we hope there is more of a view to leadership than management because it is something you need to be good at but not occupy your whole time.*
>
> *Superintendents, I think also have to watch that because you could be just simply doing the management, getting by day to day rather than really looking at long term strategic planning and that's where you look at factors like where are we going, what is inhibiting where we want to go?*

Harvey

Harvey identified the specific legislation requiring superintendents to perform the role of Chief Executive Officer as well as that of Chief Academic Officer.

My perception of the superintendent is that he/she is both a CEO and a CAO. Section 94 of the Alberta School Act names us the CEO of the Board and the 'Chief Education Officer of the district of division.' To me this means that I am the person responsible for executing the directives and requirements of the Board, and also providing educational leadership at an instructional administrative level for the welfare of teaching and student learning in the school division.

Despite the legislation, Harvey reported feeling pressured to devote more time to Chief Executive Officer responsibilities. He wanted to be more involved with educational leadership, but the reality of his position resulted in a more corporate focus.

I think I do find myself doing more of the Chief Executive Officer role and wishing that I could spend more time in the Chief Educational Officer role. However, that may be a natural and appropriate progression, since I delegate so much of the Chief Education Officer role to my Associate Superintendent of Instruction. Nevertheless, I would prefer to be more involved with the educational as opposed to the executive function.

Mathew

Mathew had a clear understanding of his role as Chief Executive Officer of the school jurisdiction. He described his official title as "CEO" rather than "superintendent." He indicated that his responsibilities concerned the corporate interests of the jurisdiction and that his associate superintendents were responsible for the academic interests. Mathew firmly believed in the importance of management within school jurisdictions:

The good ones [superintendents], the ones that are winning are the ones with good management, and school jurisdictions, if you're going to win, you got to have good management, it's that simple. Now, if faculties of education can deliver it, that's wonderful. If faculties of business can do it, that's wonderful. Royal Rhodes is offering an MBA in school based administration, or educational administration right now. I was like, wow!, this is pretty good. As a matter of fact I sent my assistant, it's going to cost me $25,000, for my secretary treasurer to start taking that program. I need him to start not looking at little stuff. You can hire people to do little stuff. He's got to look at the business operations of the organization and make sure that it makes the education side work, and he's got to understand it, and he's got to understand how people work.

Don

Don described the importance of being an effective general manager. He was hesitant to use corporate terminology in an educational discourse; however, he defended the use of "manager" to accurately describe the current role of superintendent. He described the transition of superintendents from educational statesmen enacting the role of educational leaders to their present role of well-balanced managers. He also indicated the flaws associated with a superintendent being merely an excellent educational leader.

I think the reality that we're in now is that the superintendent needs to be a well balanced general manager, and I think it's hard to do that if you don't have a good deep appreciation of your core business, but at the same time, if you're just a super master teacher then you're probably going to get blind sided by some of

these other non-instructional issues and concerns that revolve, you know, 'cause public education is bigger than just teaching.

Don spoke of the importance of a general manager having a clearly defined and articulated vision for a balanced program or service delivery structure. The effectiveness of a superintendent, according to Don, resulted from the ability to balance the issues of the short term with the long-term strategic direction for the jurisdiction.

Chris

Chris's response to this question was intertwined with his vision of the future of the superintendency. He indicated superintendents were becoming more like Chief Executive Officers than Chief Academic Officers:

But it's as a chief executive officer, I find that over the years that I'm less and less involved in actual educational leadership. I don't see that as a good thing. I think its being forced on us. In fact I even heard that when they change rules superintendents may be people that have business degrees rather than educational degrees in the future, but I hope there is some kind of connection still to the classroom down the road. It's kind of diminished now, and it's diminishing more as time goes by.

Chris maintained that a corporate focus was a necessary reality given the current educational milieu; however, he also reaffirmed the importance of educational and instructional leadership for the superintendency.

Jack

Jack stressed an emphasis on managerial issues. He indicated that instructional leadership was important; however, the reality of the educational milieu often directed

the superintendent's attention toward the managerial end of the administrative continuum.

> *Superintendents often talk about instructional leadership issues but when curriculum tends to be defined at the provincial level, and implemented in the school, and you take finances out of the senior administrative level at the school district level, then you have less resources available to deal with instructional leadership, and when the obligations that come down lie more in the area of policies, regulations and finance then the superintendency tends to be drawn into that area more than allowed to go the other way.*

Jack reported that instructional leadership was possible for larger school jurisdictions possessing the necessary resources to facilitate such a focus.

> *Now, I think that that depends very much on the size of the school district. The larger districts have more resources that they can put into instructional leadership and more resources to put into managerial aspect, the superintendent can then, may then have more choice as to whether he spend his time in the instructional leadership or the managerial area.*

7. What are the future challenges for the superintendency?

John

John indicated that superintendents would continue to exist in the future but expressed concern regarding the role of rural boards and the evolution of the school trusteeship.

I'm just a little concerned, I don't see Alberta moving that way, but if you take enough things away from the role it could happen and the one that concerns us right now is of course for the first time is collective bargaining where the province is stepping over and giving an amount for teachers and I don't know how that will end up I think the key role of trusteeship, the trusteeship will play a key role. As goes the trusteeship so goes the superintendency.

John portrayed the superintendency in the future as being concerned more with leadership than with management of the school jurisdiction. He warned of the potential to become mired in the minutiae of administration, a problem that would undermine the kind of foresight that an effective leader should possess.

So we hope there is more of a view to leadership than management because it is something you need to be good at but not occupy your whole time. Superintendents, I think also have to watch that because you could just simply doing the management, getting by day to day rather than really looking at long term strategic planning and that's where you look at factors like long term strategic planning like where are we going, what's inhibiting where we want to go.

Harvey

Harvey argued that the future of public education would include the superintendency. He described his concern regarding the trend of non-educators being appointed as senior education officials.

We all perked up then, and I said, does that mean that there's a possibility that now we would have an assistant deputy minister that had a K-12 education who

might be a non-educator? Sue said, yeah, that's possible. Those things, if that trend continues at the provincial level, superintendents are going to be even more important than they are now because they will be the last line of people that are educators that know their nuts and bolts of education. I think the job's going to become more and more complex and more difficult.

Harvey concluded with a cautionary note concerning the roles of senior administration and government in the future of the superintendency. He emphasized the need for these two groups to establish good relationships and to work collaboratively. He noted the importance of senior administrators being able to conduct their roles without political interference.

The future of the superintendency, there has to be a recognition at all levels of government, local all the way up, that superintendents and their teams need to be left alone to administer board policy, and government policy, and to do it according to the law in an ethical moral manner based on the missions and visions of the organization, which is the welfare of kids, and that politicians play their political governance role, listen to their public, direct complainants through the right channels and not attempt to get involved and deal with some of these issues themselves. And yet having said that there needs to be a close, close communication, communicatory relationship between the administration and the government, that if the people in governments understand what it is that's just happened, and so that they can have the heads-up and know they need to be schooled as to how to direct people with concerns through the proper channels, and I think that if that's well done the future of the superintendency will be better.

It'll be easier for superintendents than it sometimes has in the past, which has been an ongoing challenge.

Mathew

Mathew distinguished between what was likely to occur and what ought to occur in the future of the superintendency. He believed that future superintendents would most likely assume similar roles as they were currently performing, with only slight modifications:

I really think that the way it will happen and the way it should happen are very different things. I think what will happen, I think in 20 years you'll come back, and you go into a superintendent's office and you'll see a superintendent doing the exact same work as they were doing now. They may be doing it a little differently, but maybe communicating a little differently, but there's going to be small changes.

Mathew asserted that future superintendents should posses entrepreneurial skills to address the imminent funding shortage in education:

What should happen is very different. I think what should happen is superintendents should be looking at being far smarter in business than they are right now. I think they have to have a much, much better knowledge of labor markets and how to deal with labor markets. I think they have to look at entrepreneurial ways of trying to solve problems 'cause there's always going to be a shortage of funds.

He referred to the need for a chief executive officer to have an overall perspective and vision for the school jurisdiction and to have superior management skills in order to lead effectively.

> *You've got to look from the 10,000 foot level instead of the 10 foot level at your jurisdiction, and it's true, having better concepts of how to run a major business because you're going to be able to do that. Not that all businessmen are good, some of them are really terrible. They don't know what they're doing, you can see bad corporations coming, but the good ones, the ones that are winning are the ones with good management, and school jurisdictions, if you're going to win, you got to have good management, it's that simple.*

Don

Don predicted that the superintendency would continue to exist in the future and noted the importance of situational leadership. He described future superintendents as pragmatic leaders who would be capable of balancing competing interests and achieving goals despite adversity.

> *I think effective superintendents always were, although I think a decade ago were able to act more as educational statesmen, and be more, play more the role of the educational leader. I think the reality we're in now is that the superintendent needs to be a well balanced general manager, and I think it's hard to do that if you don't have a good deep appreciation of your core business, but at the same time, if you're just a super master teacher then you're probably going to get blind sided by some of these other non-instructional issues and concerns that revolve, you know, 'cause public education is bigger than just teaching.*

He also discussed the necessity to strive towards a "balance." He used the word "balance" in reference to coping with the many superintendent responsibilities:

> *I kept coming back to this over the years, it's all about balance. I think, a position in any organizational structure that'll kind of focus on that, not balance today, or balance yesterday, but that's sort of the strategic view, where are we going to be in three years, or five years, and what's a balanced program or service delivery model or structure going to look like when we get there? Both the big picture and the little picture, both a macro and micro. Like I guess when I use the term general manager, that's kind of what I'm getting at, a public organization like a school jurisdiction as well, that the superintendent has to sort of cover the big picture and here and now, short term and intermediate to long term. And then I think the other thing is you kind of have to flex to where the issues of the moment are.*

Chris

Chris believed that the superintendent's role was likely to shift to that of chief executive officer rather than remaining that of a traditional educational leader. He reported that over the tenure of his superintendency, he has become less involved in actual educational leadership.

> *Well, the way it's going I think that the idea of being an educational leader is being lost. I think it's going to be more or less like a chief executive officer of Nortel Networks. We're going to become more and more like financial managers and we'll leave the educational leadership up to the executive officers that are working with us.*

Chris stressed the importance of future superintendents collaborating with their colleagues. He mentioned the importance of being able to encourage staff when they suggest novel ideas and of being involved in the supportive efforts necessary to foster the fruition of such initiatives:

> *You have to be able to facilitate. Someone comes to you with a good idea and you don't think of any obvious arguments against it, you let them fly with it and try to make it happen. I try to surround myself with people who are like minded in terms of trying to be facilitators rather than blockers, but it's just a comment on a different style of doing things.*

Jack

Jack predicted that the superintendency would continue to exist in the near future. He itemized the superintendency's problems, which consisted of the dual reporting role and contractual constraints, and which placed an increased amount of stress upon the superintendent. He mentioned that the future of the trusteeship would have direct impact on the future of the superintendency. Jack emphasized the effects that decentralization and site-based decision making may have in the future:

> *If the view is everything is going to be central to the provincial government and that we are going to delegate certain duties to specific school sites, and they change the reporting function and the financial system to reflect that, then there may not be a need for the superintendency, or for that matter, for central office. If the view is that there is a need to have some type of local structure, not the superintendent, not the trusteeship, not involving the trusteeship, then it may be*

that the superintendency becomes the structure and the way rules and regulations are defined could be quite different.

Summary

The summary section will present the common themes that have emerged from each of the sub-questions.

Sub-question 1

Per Capita Funding Inequity

Harvey and Don identified the issue of per capita funding limitations. The centralized model for educational funding disbursal based on sparsity and distance formulas was inadequately funding the increased cost of administering school jurisdictions in remote rural communities. Harvey believed that this model was unable to account for the large reserve funds that industry-rich jurisdictions had accumulated prior to restructuring and that this inability resulted in glaring inequities.

Additional Funding

Mathew explained that remote jurisdictions needed to secure additional funding above and beyond current sparsity and distance allotments. In a *Jurisdictional Report to Alberta Learning* (2001), Mathew itemized the exorbitant cost of teacher recruitment and teacher retention. These costs, the increased cost of northern living, and aggressive competition from southern Alberta jurisdictions necessitated an additional two million dollars in funding.

Earmarked Funding Constraints

Chris and Jack asserted that the increased government limitations imposed on educational funding had resulted in the diminished discretionary capacity of superintendents. This problem has increased tensions among stakeholder groups regarding the future direction of public education.

Sub-question 2

Relationship Building

The importance of building and fostering positive relationships with the numerous educational stakeholders emerged as a common theme. The superintendents were concerned with building and maintaining relationships with the following stakeholder groups: trustees, parents, school advisory councils, teachers and corporate partners. Harvey indicated that superintendents needed to be student centered when fostering relationships. Jack viewed current relationships with educational stakeholders as "less cohesive" than was the case prior to educational reforms, with a preponderance of "advocacy type behavior" as parents became more informed and skilled at achieving personal agendas.

Politics

The theme of relationship-building has political overtones. Mathew illustrated the importance of strategic alliances and an awareness of balancing power. Several participants commented on the need to establish a positive rapport with school trustees but expressed disdain for who trustees meddled in administrative affairs. Don indicated that the politics of the role has forced the superintendent to be adept at "facilitation, brokerage and mediation." Chris indicated that a superintendent has to be perceived as a

"neutral listener" capable of making unbiased judgements while maintaining a positive disposition.

Sub-question 3

Contentions about Dual Reporting

Clearly, the participants perceived the dual reporting role of the superintendent as being potentially ambiguous and as setting the stage for tensions between the two employers. One exception to this theme, stated by John, was that the shift in governance organization for public education served to clarify his role as superintendent. The previous governance structure left stakeholders unsure of the status of the superintendent. However, John concurred that the current dual role of the superintendent had the potential to create tension between the school boards and Alberta Learning.

Role Ambiguity

The participants described the role ambiguity experienced by superintendents. Several participants described their jurisdiction and trustees as having a clear sense of the superintendent's role; however, external stakeholders were perceived as less informed. Mathew explained that he operated under the Carver model, which was far more entrepreneurial than the models followed in other jurisdictions and, consequently, was less understood. Chris commented on the role ambiguity that occurred when the lines between trustees and superintendents became unclear.

Sub-question 4

Amalgamation Issues

John and Chris mentioned the reticence of jurisdictions to embrace the amalgamation resulting from educational restructuring. Teachers' reluctance to be amalgamated strained relations and cultures within the newly formed school jurisdiction.

Governance Structure

John and Harvey viewed the newly restructured school governance as an improvement to the previous structure. Harvey reported that the new school board organization held public education as a priority focus. John asserted that his role as superintendent was clearly delineated as the Chief Executive Officer of the Board as a result of educational reforms.

Stakeholder Accountability

Harvey and Jack reported an increased demand for accountability from stakeholders as a result of educational reforms. Parents were perceived as more informed because of their increased involvement within the governance of public education through such committees as school advisory councils. Parents were more knowledge regarding their rights to challenge decisions and press their own agendas.

Role Change

Don noted the change in the superintendent's role from an advocate of educational issues to that of a pragmatic leader. He noted that his colleagues, prior to the reforms spearheaded educational issues. The current educational milieu has imposed constraints on funding and limitations on decision-making, creating a more conservative and pragmatic type of leader.

Student Funding

Jack believed that restructuring had directed the superintendent's focus to the importance of student recruitment in light of its funding implications. In other words, increased enrollments signified increased educational funding, so a competitive model was needed to attract students.

Sub-question 5

Power

A common theme concerned the participants' conceptions of power. All participants felt that authoritarian methods were archaic and ineffective. Leadership from a distance, especially within a rural model, was important. The superintendents identified the need to foster trusting relationships with colleagues and to entrust them with delegated duties.

Delegation of responsibility to senior administrators was perceived as a sign of confidence in their ability. Delegation had practical implications and was necessary to accomplish the many senior administrative tasks. The participants noted that the responsibilities of instructional leadership were often delegated to the associate superintendents for implementation and operation.

Sub-question 6

Chief Executive Officer Focus

The participants reported that their role in the current educational milieu predominately involved a CEO's responsibilities. The participants unanimously agreed that instructional leadership was an important role for the superintendents; however, it was often delegated to the associate superintendents. Harvey and Chris indicated they

would prefer to spend increased time on instructional leadership, but that doing so was impossible given the realities and demands of the role.

Sub-question 7

All of the participants agreed that the superintendency would exist in the future much as it does in its current form.

Trusteeship

John and Jack had indicated their concern over the future of the trusteeship. They had reported that the trusteeship and the superintendency were intricately involved with one another, each affecting the other. John stated, "As goes the trusteeship, so goes the supertendency."

Non-Educator Influence

Harvey was concerned about the role of non-educators in the future of public education administration. He felt that the deputy minister of education could potentially set a crucial direction for the province's superintendents provided this individual was well-versed in the culture of Alberta's public education.

Entrepreneurial

Mathew distinguished between what will happen and what should happen in the future of the superintendency. He believed that its future would be marginally different that its present, with slight modifications in communications. He believed what should occur was an entrepreneurial model for the role. He indicated that a managerial focus and training would be definitive assets to resolve the superintendency's future challenges.

The next chapter identifies the emergent themes for the main research question and the sub-questions. These themes are compared and contrasted to the themes in the literature review.

Chapter 6

Discussion of Emergent Themes

The following chapter examines the research findings and discusses emergent themes related to the main research question and sub-questions. The emergent themes are compared and contrasted to the themes in the literature review presented in Chapter Two. Important findings are discussed under the following headings: Resolution Strategies, Conflict Management, Rural versus Urban Jurisdictions, Single Issues, and Resolution versus Closure.

Provision of Equitable Education

A common theme that emerged from the findings was a concern for providing equitable education. The majority of the participants described their concern over the issues of equity in small rural high schools. In particular, the participants commonly identified the inadequacy of the high school sciences currently being taught in small rural schools. This finding correlates with the *Superintendents' Issue Survey Report* (1990), which noted "the teacher shortages especially in rural and remote areas and some specialty subjects such as math, French, science and music" (p. 3). The report did not specify, as did the findings, the inequitable treatment of small rural high schools; rather it focused on teacher shortages, which especially in the high school sciences, have a detrimental effect on educational equity. A lack of qualified science teachers limits course offerings for small rural high schools. Wiebe's (2001) report on small rural schools confirmed this finding:

> Most jurisdictions reported that the senior high grades in small rural schools had considerable difficulty in offering more than basic programs.

> One jurisdiction stated, 'there are concerns about meeting basic graduation requirements. Schools do not offer any program beyond' [the basic] (p. 18). Another jurisdiction reported, 'in addition the pressure to offer core programs to both 10, 20, 30 and 13, 23 and 33 becomes extremely difficult. Adding new courses like the transitional math course at the grade 10 level is an impossibility'. (p. 18)

Although a majority of participants shared this concern, Jack, the suburban superintendent, was an interesting exception. An abundant supply of qualified high school science teachers was readily available to instruct in his jurisdiction. I worked in this jurisdiction for an extended period of time and observed the limited job vacancy rate. Professional development for beginning teachers was well established and evident in the recent beginning teacher mentorship program initiated by the associate superintendent. This mentorship program paired beginning teachers with master cooperating teachers to foster effective teaching pedagogies.

A common resolution for the issue of equitable education involved the advent of virtual education. Several participants optimistically believed that the Supernet would resolve various aspects of this issue; however, most participants did not view technology as a panacea for equitable education. In fact, a majority of participants preferred to have a teacher present to instruct a class despite technology's ability to increase equability. I observed virtual education in operation during two separate site visits. One particular virtual school delivered an on-line instructional program to several hundred K-12 students. The operating platforms included Lotus notes and Web CT. The benefit of the dual platform ensured that student learning was not constrained by limited access to the

Internet. The group of virtual teachers was specialized into grade and subject areas and could interact with students via the Internet, telephone and scheduled group field trips. This resolution had direct funding implications for future implementation. Specifically, the infrastructure costs associated with the implementation of the Supernet were potentially enormous.

A second strategy involved the practice of hiring multi-talented teachers capable of managing several specialists' workloads. John indicated that beginning teachers were hired on the premise of teaching a variety of specialists' subjects and teachers were placed within proximity of several school sites to serve specialists' needs.

Funding Frameworks

The three subthemes that emerged under the auspices of funding frameworks were Per Capita Inequity, Earmarked Funding and Increased Funding.

Per Capita Inequity

Several participants described the per capita funding limitations resulting from educational restructuring. One problem was identified as the flawed system of sparsity and distance funding for the rural jurisdictions. Wiebe's (2001) study confirmed these findings regarding the inherent inequity problems with this funding formula:

> Sparsity and distance funding are allocated to jurisdictions to provide program equity. Both funding mechanisms pre-date the current funding framework. The sparsity and distance formulas were incorporated with little change into the funding framework when it was adopted in 1995-96. (p. 24)

Wiebe (2001) recommended that "Alberta Learning improve funding equity for small rural schools by replacing sparsity funding with a formula that takes into account real cost factors such as school size and grade organization" (p. 31).

Earmarked Funding

The participants described the problems associated with the earmarked funding resulting from educational reforms. The complexity and costs associated with the application process for AISI grants were described. Several superintendents mentioned that earmarked funding had diminished their discretionary powers for funding dispersal. One clear example was the 4% funding limitations imposed for certificated wage increases. Superintendents felt that their ability to negotiate collective agreements was compromised and that potential labor strife would inevitably ensue. Streifling (1995) supported this belief, concluding that changing social and economic conditions were reported to be the most significant forces producing role changes. As well Murphy (1994) cited politics, funding, and professional development as obstacles to superintendent effectiveness.

Increased Funding

The participants described the incessant need for additional funds to fulfill their administrative duties. Additional funds were necessary to compensate for the inadequacy of sparsity and distance funding, to address the high cost of teacher retention/recruitment, and to fund technology resolutions. This need was confirmed at the CASS Issues Forum (2001), where recommendations for action on a majority of the provincial issues suggested a funding component. The Special Education Review Implementation recommended that superintendents should "continue advocating for mild/moderate

funding for early intervention along with clarity and standards for identification" (*CASS Issues Forum Summary*, 2001, p. 1).

Resolutions for the funding framework themes were conspicuously absent from initial interview transcript data. I had to probe further in order to elicit specific strategies to resolve this issue and sensed a perceived lack of control over these funding issues. The common response concerned efforts to lobby government officials to ease limitations and return to the past practice of allowing superintendents more discretion in directing funding.

Attracting and Retaining Staff

The emergent theme concerning staffing also had funding implications. The challenge of attracting and retaining teachers was a common concern for the participants. Urban locations were highly sought after by a majority of beginning teachers, so superintendents were forced to use teacher recruitment and retention strategies to reduce teacher turnover rates within their jurisdictions. These strategies required additional funding to offset the rising costs of implementation. This problem was more pervasive in northern remote jurisdictions than in other jurisdictions closer to urban centers.

Resolutions also had direct funding implications. The participants described incentive strategies that included bursaries, moving allowances, and wage incentives to attract and retain teachers and address the potential for higher teacher turnover rates.

Discussion of Resolution Strategies

The importance of funding for resolution strategies was evident in the findings. Staffing resolutions involved both teacher recruitment and teacher retention strategies based on availability of funding to implement them. This finding was clearly demonstrated in Mathew's jurisdiction by recent proposals for an additional two million dollars to offset the cost of implementing such initiatives (*Jurisdictional Report,* 2001).

The issue of equitable education was addressed via virtual education solutions. The infrastructure costs to operationalize solutions such as the Supernet were a tremendous expense. The costs associated with ensuring that small rural schools were connected to the Internet also had major funding implications for the school jurisdiction.

The participants addressed the emergent theme of funding via concerted lobbying efforts to reverse current limitations imposed by earmarked funding. This strategy had political ramifications as soliciting additional funding involved direct interaction with the government. Clearly, for Alberta school superintendents, funding and politics were inextricably linked as a means of resolving prevalent problems.

Politics

The participants responded that politics were inherent within the superintendent's role. Leithwood (1995) concurred and emphasized the political nature of the superintendent's position, which has changed from having a micro to a macro political focus. Kochan (1999) echoed these findings: "Superintendents viewed the major change in their job as increased politicization, stating that they had had to become more political and more adept in people skills" (p. 105). The importance of building and fostering positive relationships emerged as a common theme. The superintendents expressed the

importance of establishing positive relationships with school trustees but were uniform in their disdain for trustee involvement in administrative decision-making. The superintendents were concerned with building and maintaining relationships with the following stakeholder groups: trustees, parents, school advisory councils, teachers and corporate partners.

The importance of the political theme and positive relationships between the superintendent and the school board was a common theme throughout the literature reviewed (Genge, 1991; Glass et al., 2000; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Green, 1988; Murphy, 1994; Streifling, 1995). However, this present study's findings pointed to a broader stakeholder audience for the superintendents. Harvey and Chris described the importance of eliminating the "siloistic" mentality and working closer with the human service providers, such as social service agencies, within communities. Mathew indicated the importance of a close relationship with corporate partners.

Power

A common theme of power emerged from the participants' discourse. The theme of politics contained elements of power and its influence on the superintendency. The participants agreed that the proverbial authoritarian methods of wielding power were archaic. This finding resonated with Doyle's (1998) conclusion: "Successful organizations are no longer characterized by a command-control structure because they did not work. Successful organizations recognize that their greatest asset is employee creativity and problem solving capacity" (p. 15). Harvey reaffirmed Doyle's (1998) comments:

And my entire philosophy of power and authority is underpinned by that belief, and again it goes back to comments I made earlier about the military model of authority where you command and you do, it's gone. And anybody that tries to make it work today is going to fail, or do irreparable harm to their operations and themselves.

A common finding was the need for superintendents to entrust senior and school administrators with responsibilities. Delegation was perceived as an act of trust in the leadership abilities of colleagues and was deemed necessary to complete the numerous administrative tasks. John specified that leading from a distance was important and that power rested in one's ability to ensure a collaborative effort by all stakeholders. Don spoke of the importance of "influence" rather than "authority." Chris alluded to the importance of shared power and the implications of trust. He ascribed to Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu's view on leadership:

A leader is best
When people barely know that he exists,
Not so good when people obey and acclaim him,
Worst when they despise him.
Fail to honor people
They fail to honor you;
But a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will all say, ' We did this ourselves.'

Lao Tzu

Harvey indicated that a superintendent had no power unless it were given away. Jack asserted that power was synonymous with stakeholder collaboration and also spoke of the importance of synergy with a group.

Role Change

The theme of superintendent-role change has emerged since the educational reforms of the 1990s. Don explained that the superintendent had changed from being an "advocate of educational issues to a pragmatic leader." Don indicated that prior to the educational reforms, he had observed his colleagues "spearheading issues" at a provincial level. Now, within the current educational milieu, with increased constraints on decision-making, he perceived superintendents as more "pragmatic."

Administrative Concerns due to Restructuring

The amalgamation of jurisdictions during the restructuring of education in Alberta had been the source of contention for teachers and senior administrators as they have struggled to forge ahead without relinquishing their former culture. John and Chris mentioned the reticence of former jurisdictions to merge under the guise of amalgamation. The restructuring influenced those superintendents who were charged with the administration of the newly formed school jurisdictions. John indicated that reducing the differences between educational cultures was "troublesome." He provided teambuilding and leadership professional development to resolve the problem. John indicated that trustees were also part of the problem. In some instances, the new culture of the school jurisdictions did not flourish until trustees finally retired. Chris indicated that amalgamation had resulted in numerous administrative concerns, particularly because of its implications for collective agreements. The merging of policies had

profound implications for leaves and seniority issues, including the potential for legal challenges of the newly drafted policies. Chris mentioned that one of his main concerns was maintaining instructional and non-instructional staff's perception of equity in this area.

Amalgamation was less important for superintendents like Jack and Mathew, who had not been directly impacted by the restructuring of their school jurisdictions. Mathew's role changed marginally to that of a consultant offering advice to neighboring jurisdictions on policy issues.

Improved Role Clarity

The literature provided an historic overview of the superintendency in Canada. One of the inherent tensions resulting from the concept of the superintendent as a CEO resulted from the ambiguity of a superintendent of schools carrying out this role (Collins, 1954). Genge (1991) asserted that one of the main pressures was to separate the role of the school board from the role of the superintendent. Boich et al. (1989) indicated that an historic split had occurred between the financial responsibilities of the secretary-treasurers and the educational responsibilities of the superintendent, causing tensions involving roles and responsibilities. Pettigrew (2000) concluded that this ambiguity had been reduced via regulation and practice and concise legislation. John and Harvey confirmed Pettigrew's (2000) findings when they reported that the reforms had had positive effects on role clarification for the superintendency. They noted that the new school boards with elected trustees, who were charged with the sole responsibility of public education, had clearer foci than those of the previous county systems of governance. John indicated that his role had been unclear prior to the educational

reforms: "so it was never really clear to people who was really in control. The role has become clearer, having one CEO has cleared it up."

Ambiguity of the Dual Reporting Role

The reforms clarified the status of the superintendent to a certain extent. For example, the amended legislation of the Schools Act of July 1994 stated that "the superintendent shall supervise the operations of schools and the provision of education programs in the district or division" (p. 64). However, the amendments to the legislation indicated that the superintendents were to have a dual reporting role to the Minister of Learning and their local school boards. The participants' comments indicated that this role has significantly affected the duties of the superintendent in Alberta. The participants also reported that the dual role was potentially ambiguous, especially when the two employers had different agendas. This potential for conflict was realized in the current labor unrest among Alberta's teachers. Downey's (1976) research confirmed the reality of the kind of ambiguities and conflicting role expectations that have characterized the emerging role of the Alberta school superintendency.

Increased Accountability

Another concern was the stakeholders' increased demands for accountability following the implementation of the educational reforms. Parents were perceived as being more informed as a result of their involvement with school governance, and, consequently, as also being more knowledgeable regarding their right to appeal the superintendent's administrative decisions. Harvey remarked, "I said the politics of a more well educated, articulate and demanding parent public, that was clearly enhanced after the era of the great reforms." Gallagher's (1995) comment in an earlier study

anticipated this finding: "Radical reform is also necessary because a substantial portion of the Canadian population is convinced that they are not getting sufficient return on their expenditures for education, one of the highest in the world" (p. 2).

Jack remarked that he had experienced less cohesiveness among stakeholders:

> *What I mean by that is they [parents] seem to have different priorities, and consequently the political actions that you need to take in having a school district operate become more complicated, and in my view, in being in this school jurisdiction over the period of 30 plus years is that because of the changes in education over the last five to ten years the stakeholder groups want to have more influence over the decisions that are being made.*

Corporate Focus

The participants noted that the CEO's role had shifted from that of the chief academic officer to that of the chief executive. Participants acknowledged the importance of academic leadership but often delegated this responsibility to an associate superintendent. Similarly, Spillane and Regnier (1998) found that the majority of participants in their study acknowledged the importance of the CEO holding the title of CAO, while, the reality of the current position mirrors Duignan's (1979) finding, that the task of balancing the interests of the position was arduous, given the fierce competition for the superintendent's time and energy. This issue was conspicuously absent from the *Superintendents' Issues Survey* (1990), which identified priority issues as fiscal equity and school infrastructure. Jack stated that a superintendent's ability to maintain an instructional leadership focus depended on the school jurisdictional size and financial resources, similarly Allison (1989) reported that the size of the school system, including

geography and diversity, had an impact on the role of the superintendent and their interactions with the jurisdiction.

The CASS Issues Form (2001), depicted in Table 6.1, lists numerous issues for Alberta school superintendents, but does not emphasize instructional leadership. One may arguably conclude that it was not a pressing issue, just as the participants did not identify it as a focus for CEOs and were willing to delegate this responsibility to their associates.

Mathew's role as a superintendent was rich with corporate connotations. He had a clear perception regarding his role as the Chief Executive Officer of his school jurisdiction. He indicated that his role included establishing corporate liaisons to facilitate increased funding to his jurisdiction. My site visitation provided a first hand account of their success. I visited a multi-million dollar renovation project to an existing high school as well as a state-of-the-art, technology-rich elementary school that rivalled the most advanced urban models. Mathew believed that instructional leadership was a priority responsibility, which he delegated to his associate superintendent. The school board valued his corporate role and planned to hire him as a consultant after he retired, to ensure future corporate liaisons.

Conflict Management

The theme of conflict management did not emerge from the interview process, but one of the themes to emerge from the literature review concerned the prevalence of conflict and the superintendent's role as conflict manager (Duignan, 1979; McMillan, 1994; Pettigrew, 2000; Wendel, 1994).

Table 6.1

CASS Issues Form Summary

ISSUE	ISSUE	ISSUE
Adequate Alternatives Programs for Expelled Students	High School Completion Rates	Special Ed Review Implementation
Alberta Distance Learning Consortium	Implications of Bill 16	Supernet-Where are we at?
Alberta Online Consortium-Why CASS should support it?	Infrastructure Issues	Teachers' Salary Negotiations
AISI Updates	Field Trip Safety Policies and Air Travel	Technology-Cost of Ownership
Compulsory Membership of Assistant/Associate Superintendents in the ATA	Review Committee on Outcomes	Technology Integration-Best Practices
Effective/Efficient Development	School Administrator Recruitment and Training	Parental Bullying/Advocacy Groups
Executive Contracts	Small Rural Schools-Maintaining Their Viability	

The themes of politics and power had conflict- management connotations, but the participants did not specify conflict management as an issue. Instead, they noted the importance of collaborative relationship-building with a variety of stakeholders. The sheer number of stakeholders that superintendents encounter has increased the potential for conflict and the necessity to be a skilled negotiator.

The Importance of Vision

Several participants confirmed the importance of vision, as did Genge (1991) and Wendel (1994), who concluded that effective CEOs were capable of articulating and communicating a vision for their school jurisdictions. Don and Mathew described the importance of an organizational vision. Don asserted that organizational vision provides a sense of direction and priority for all issues and concerned stakeholders. Mike believed that the superintendent and associate superintendents require a broad view of an organization in order to successfully plan for its future needs. Gerry mentioned the importance of conceptualizing a vision and then delegating the responsibilities in order to operationalize the resulting plan.

Discrepancies between Rural/Suburban Concerns

Jack reported issues that were both similar and different from those of the rural participants. One issue commonly reported concerned the inherent problems associated with earmarked funding, a shared concern for a majority of the participants interviewed. Jack's other main issue concerned a sabbatical leave grievance, which was unique to his jurisdiction. A majority of the participants were also concerned with equitable education and staffing issues. Jack's lack of concern with these issues illustrated the uniqueness of the suburban jurisdiction compared to the rural jurisdictions.

Single Issues for Superintendents

Seventeen of the 23 issues identified by the participants were single-issue responses. Table 4.2 presented these issues under the following themes: Administration, Governance, Policy, and Society. The three themes of Administration, Governance and Policy contained elements of educational reform throughout. The issues of staff development, school-based management, the trustee's role, schools of choice, and separate school education resulted from the educational reforms and have necessitated an administrative response from the participants. Don described the inconsistency of staff development resulting from the decentralization of professional development within his jurisdiction. Decentralization led to site-based management, which Mazurek (1999) identified as part of the educational reforms of 1996-97:

> For 1996/97, the proposed changes include having Career and Technology Studies implemented; local attendance boundaries removed; competencies for beginning and experienced teachers established; site based management implemented; uniform provincial mill rates, and an overall budget reduction target of a quarter of a billion dollars.
> (as cited in Kachur & Harrison, 1999, p. 16)

The quarter-billion-dollar decrease in funding arguably exacerbated the declining school population, bussing, and curricular problems identified by Harvey.

Resolution versus Closure

During the interview process, the participants described several different attempted strategies to resolve contemporary problems and emphasized the common themes of funding and politics. Resolution strategies for the major issues were not

synonymous with solution and closure for these issues continue to be problems despite the superintendents' best efforts to resolve them. Nevertheless, some minor issues raised in Chapter 4 were resolved with closure. Chris' issue of Foot and Mouth Disease was resolved and had not re-emerged. Foot and Mouth Disease was isolated to the outbreak of a rare epidemic for which proactive measures were sufficient to attain closure; however, school violence continued to be a jurisdictional issue. Chris described that despite efforts such as Safe and Caring School Initiatives, parents remained skeptical of the safety of modern schools.

Discrepancy between Findings and Literature

The discussion of the emergent themes reveals that funding is a pervasive common thread. Funding has major implications for provision of equitable education, funding frameworks, and attracting and retaining staff. Like Murphy (1994) and Streifling (1995) who indicated funding's potential to influence the superintendent's position, I found that this issue was a pervasive concern. Furthermore, lobbying efforts to deal with these concerns were not perceived as highly successful.

Attracting and retaining staff, resolution strategies, administrative concerns due to educational restructuring, rural versus urban concerns, and resolution versus closure are issues that emerged from the study but were not confirmed by the literature review as depicted in Table 6.2. Conflict management did not emerge as a common theme as the literature had originally posited. Provision of an equitable education, funding, politics, power, role change, improved role clarity, ambiguity of dual role, increased accountability, corporate focus, and vision were all confirmed by the literature (Table 6.2). This present study's results provide insights into effects of the educational

reform that were not clearly articulated in the literature. Educational reforms have influenced the following areas of superintendents' responsibilities and concerns: politics, power, increased administrative concerns, dual reporting role, increased accountability, and single issues (staff development, school-based management, the trustee's role, schools of choice, and separate school education).

The following chapter presents the overview, conclusions, recommendations, and reflections of this study. The first section provides a summary of the study's purpose, significance, and research method. The second section summarizes the research findings. The third section discusses the general conclusions. The final section presents recommendations and reflections drawn from the conclusions.

Table 6.2

Discrepancy between Findings and Literature

Theme	Literature
1. Provision of Equitable Education	C
2. Funding Frameworks	C*
3. Attracting and Retaining Staff	D
4. Resolution Strategies	D
5. Politics	C
6. Power	C
7. Role Change	C*
8. Administrative Concerns because of Restructuring	D
9. Improved Role Clarity	C
10. Ambiguity of the Dual Reporting Role	C
11. Increased Accountability	C
12. Corporate Focus	C
13. Conflict Management	R
14. Discrepancies between rural versus Urban Jurisdictions	D
15. Resolution versus Closure	D

Notes:
C = confirmed by the literature
C* = not clearly delineated in the literature
R = refuted by the study
D = did not emerge from the literature

Chapter 7

Overview, Conclusions, Recommendations and Reflections

This chapter provides an overview of the study, a summary of the research findings, conclusions, recommendations for further practice and future research, and reflections. This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section provides an overview of the study's purpose, significance, and research method. Section Two summarizes the research findings. Section Three discusses the conclusions reached in this study. The final section presents the recommendations and implications of the study, followed by a discussion of personal reflections.

Overview of the Study

The nature of this study, which included the Identification and Resolution of Issues Challenging Alberta School Superintendents, can be described in terms of its purpose, significance and research method.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the current challenges affecting public school superintendents in Alberta. In order to increase current and aspiring superintendents' understanding of the superintendency, one of this study's primary goals was to elicit insights by exploring the challenges faced by current CEOs. As well as identifying challenges, this study also tried to discover the strategies used to resolve them. Situated within the context of educational reform, the study concentrated

on the identification and resolution of contemporary public educational issues challenging rural/suburban Alberta school superintendents.

Statement of the Problem

The following question guided this study: What are the current issues facing Alberta school superintendents and what strategies are used to resolve these issues? The study addressed the following sub-questions:

1. How has provincial funding affected the quality of Alberta education?
2. What strategies are used to maintain an effective working relationship with the school board and other educational stakeholders?
3. Has the role of the superintendent been defined clearly enough so that all educational stakeholders have a sense of the CEO's responsibilities?
4. What jurisdictional concerns, if any, have arisen since the educational reforms of the 1990s?
5. What role does employee delegation play in the management of a school jurisdiction?
6. Is the superintendent viewed as the chief executive officer or a chief academic officer?
7. What are the future challenges for the superintendency?

Significance of the Study

The position of the public school superintendent in Canada represents a major role in educational leadership that has significantly changed since its inception (Boich et al., 1989). Superintendents occupy a unique and integral position in the formal organization of school systems. As chief executive officers, some manage multi-million dollar budgets, administer large numbers of employees, and are in a position to substantially influence the effectiveness of their systems (Genge, 1991). Until very recently, scholars have largely neglected to examine this role (Boich et al., 1989; Crowson & Morris, 1990), although Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) did report on the existing problems in the office of the superintendent.

Educational reforms have significantly changed the educational landscape within Alberta school jurisdictions and have created unprecedented tensions and problems for current superintendents to resolve. A decade has passed by since comprehensive research was last performed on the Alberta school superintendency. The discrepancy between my proposed conceptual framework (Chapter 2) and the actual conceptual framework based on the findings of this study have enabled it to contribute to theory by refining our understanding of the current issues facing superintendents in the era of educational reform. Contributions to practice emerged from the recommendations regarding current superintendent professional development and post-secondary training for public school administrators.

Method

Six participants from Alberta school jurisdictions were purposefully selected on the basis of availability and willingness to participate in the research. Initial contact was

made in person at the CASS/Alberta Learning conference held in Edmonton April 2001. Informal verbal consent was secured, followed by formal written consent to participate in the study. (see Appendices B & C, pp. 198-201.) Superintendents chosen for selection were full-time, responsible for only one school system and had been in their positions for at least one year. Five of the superintendents were from rural jurisdictions, and one was from a suburban jurisdiction. In accordance with the philosophy of interpretive inquiry and the interview design, the instrument employed for data collection was semi-structured in nature. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed into text. In addition, I spent up to two full days with participants. The site-visits assisted the generation of emergent themes. A field journal was keep throughout the study. Site-visit notes and thoughts were tape-recorded and transcribed into text. Group-member checks were later held with participants to confirm my interpretations of the data.

The study was exploratory and interpretive in nature. These data reported were highly contextual, and readers should use caution when making generalizations to a broader context. However, the reader must also ultimately determine the extent to which the findings are relevant to their context. The major research findings are summarized in the following section.

Summary of Research Findings

I analyzed these data to determine and identify recurring comments and themes related to the major research question: What are the current issues facing Alberta school superintendents, and what strategies are being used to resolve these issues? A review of Table 4.1 indicated that numerous issues were challenging Alberta school superintendents on a daily basis. This study identified 23 issues ranging from leadership issues to foot and mouth disease. An in-depth data analysis reduced the issues into the following themes reported as findings. Findings 1-3 specifically addressed the main research question. Findings 4-12 specifically addressed the sub-questions.

Finding 1: Provision of Equitable Education

A common theme that emerged as an issue for the participants was equity in education. Small rural high schools were identified as a concern because of the perceived inadequacy of the current high school science course offerings. The participants reported that the lack of qualified high school specialists reduced the capacity of small rural high schools to offer programs comparable to the programs being offered by urban high schools.

Finding 2: Funding

Funding was a pervasive issue for the participants. Funding also permeated resolution strategies. Findings 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 elaborate on this pervasiveness.

Finding 2.1: Per Capita Inequity

Per capita funding limitations resulting from educational restructuring led to a perceived inequity in rural jurisdictions. Like Wiebe (2001), the participants criticized

the sparsity and distance funding formula for being inadequate and unrepresentative of the actual cost of rural education.

Finding 2.2: Earmarked Funding

Earmarked funding, resulting from the educational restructuring, was perceived as diminishing the superintendent's administrative capacity. The participants described the process of applying for AISI grants as time-consuming and destructive, and believed that they received limited financial benefits from it. One clear example was the 4% funding limitation imposed on certificated staff wage increases, which had arguably led to the current labor strife between Alberta's teachers and the government.

Finding 2.3: Increased Funding

Participants described the constant demand for additional government funding to offset the costs of rural education. Additional funds are required to address the perceived inadequacy of current sparsity and distance funding, to fund teacher retention and recruitment initiatives and to finance technology resolutions. Increased funding was a common theme throughout the participant's strategies for resolving their problems.

Finding 3: Attracting and Retaining Staff

The challenge of attracting and retaining high quality teachers was a common issue for a majority of the participants. The superintendents were forced to implement costly teacher recruitment and retention strategies to address the high turnover within their jurisdictions.

The following findings were presented as related to the sub-questions:

Finding 4: Politics

Politics emerged throughout the interviewing process. The importance of building and fostering relationships with all educational stakeholders was evident. Participants were uniform in their disdain for trustee interference in the senior administration's decision-making. The stakeholder groups of concern to superintendents had broadened to include not only parents, teachers and school trustees, but also school advisory council chairs and corporate partners as well. Liaisons with human service providers within the community were perceived as advantageous.

Politics emerged as pivotal in the participants' resolution techniques. The ability to foster positive government and corporate partnerships was perceived as advantageous and necessary in order to address demands for increased educational funding.

Finding 5: Power

The theme of power emerged from the study as well. The participants agreed that authoritarian methods were archaic within the current educational milieu. Superintendents perceived delegation as an important task to be entrusted to senior colleagues. The participants spoke of "influence" rather than "authority" and of the need to collaborate to achieve synergy within jurisdictions.

Finding 6: Role Change

The changing role of the superintendent emerged as a theme among the participants, one of whom characterized superintendent leadership style, post-reforms, as

more pragmatic than pedagogical. The constraints of earmarked funding were cited as contributing factors to the changed role of the superintendency.

Finding 7: Administrative Concerns due to Restructuring

The educational restructuring of the 1990s created new boundaries for school jurisdictions under the guise of amalgamation. Superintendents who endured amalgamation were invariably affected by the changes. Former jurisdictions were reticent about amalgamation, creating new problems for superintendents. One of the challenges for the participants lay in coping with differences in culture among teaching staff. Amalgamation also created administrative and legal concerns related to merging policies, especially collective agreements.

Finding 8: Improved Role Clarity

Participants responded that restructuring had clarified their role to a certain extent in terms of authority. Prior to restructuring and the current school board governance, the superintendent's role in relation to that of the former secretary treasurer was ambiguous. The current governance eliminated this ambiguity by elevating the superintendent to chief executive officer status.

Finding 9: Ambiguity of the Dual Reporting Role

The current jurisdictional governance system was not flawless. The roles of the superintendent and the elected trustees, who now had a clearer public education focus, had been clarified; however, the superintendent reported to two employers, the school board and the minister of education. The participants reported that their dual role could lead to ambiguity when the two employers had diverging educational agendas. The

participants were concerned about the high probability of tension under such a governance structure.

Finding 10: Increased Accountability

Stakeholders' demands for increased accountability were identified as a concern for the superintendents. Parents were described as more knowledgeable regarding their rights within public education and as increasingly diligent in pursuit of personal agendas.

Finding 11: Corporate Focus

The participants perceived that superintendents were now serving more as chief executive officers than as chief academic officers. The participants agreed that instructional leadership was important; however, because of their many duties, the participants often delegated this responsibility to senior administrators.

Finding 12: Conflict Management

The literature review identified conflict management as relevant to the role of the superintendent (Duignan, 1979; McMillan, 1994; Pettigrew, 2000; Wendel, 1994), but this theme did not emerge from the interview process. The themes of politics and power, which contain minor conflict-management overtones, were identified. The importance of collaborative relationship-building with a variety of stakeholders was a commonly reported theme.

Finding 13: Resolution of Issues

The participants' resolution strategies did not result in closure. I found that funding and politics were inextricably linked as means to address prevalent issues. However, funding problems continued despite the lobbying efforts of the participants. I sensed the participants' frustration with the lack of closure for these problems. One

exception was the issue of foot and mouth disease, which because of its limited parameters and scope, was resolved and had not re-emerged.

Finding 14: Single Issues

Table 4.2 presented the 17 single-item issues to emerge from this study. These issues, although unique for the participants, were categorized under the headings of Administration, Governance, Policy and Society. In addition, the educational reform of the 1990s was perceived as an underlying cause for the following issues: staff development, school-based management, the trustee's role, schools of choice, and separate school education.

Conclusions

The following statements and generalizations are the conclusions reached based on the findings of this study.

Conclusion 1

Findings 1,2-2.3 and 3 clearly identify funding as a pervasive issue for Alberta school superintendents. Findings 2.1-2.3 indicate the changes that have occurred since educational reforms of the 1990s. Earmarked funding and per capita inequity have had a direct impact on the role of the Alberta school superintendent.

Conclusion 2

Educational reforms have had a direct effect on the role of the Alberta School superintendents. Findings 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 identify the specific changes as having occurred in the following areas: role change, administrative concerns, role clarity, dual role

tension, and stakeholder accountability. Finding 14 identifies the pervasiveness of educational reforms within single issues.

Conclusion 3

Commonalties and discrepancies among issues and resolutions were noted among rural and suburban jurisdictions and identified in finding 14. Finding 1 applied to all participants except Jack, the suburban superintendent. Finding 2.1 applied to all participants. Finally, commonalties and discrepancies were also found among rural superintendents' issues and resolutions.

Conclusion 4

As is stated in finding 13, issue resolution was not synonymous with closure. Proposed resolutions to address the issues mentioned in findings 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 involved government lobbying efforts to increase funding or to lift earmarked constraints, and addressed the issues in the short term; however, these issues continued to challenge and frustrate superintendents, with no imminent closure

Conclusion 5

Finding 12 refuted the literature claim that conflict management was a prevalent theme for public school superintendents.

Conclusion 6

Findings 4, 5 and 6 identify the importance of politics in the role of the school superintendent. Superintendents were encouraged to forge new relationships with an ever-growing array of stakeholders. Adeptness in this political arena facilitated prowess as a senior administrator.

Conclusion 7

Finding 11 indicated the importance of the management role performed by the current superintendents, whose time constraints and administrative focus had diminished their capacity to act as instructional leaders.

Conclusion 8

Findings 8 and 9 indicated that educational reform was paradoxical regarding role clarity. Finding 8 was that role clarity had increased after restructuring; however, finding 9 illustrated that the current dual-reporting role was creating tensions. The reality of reporting to two employers was straining relations, as agendas became divergent. Finding 4 indicated the disdain for trustee interference in administrative decision-making process.

Conclusion 9

Staffing in rural jurisdictions was an historic problem inherent within remote rural school jurisdictions. Findings 1 and 3 identified the challenges of maintaining a full staffing complement capable of providing the full range of curricula. Costly recruitment and retention strategies were short-term strategies contingent on increased educational funding.

Conclusion 10

Findings 2.1, 2.2, 6 and 12 indicated that the conceptual framework derived from the literature was inadequate given the findings of this study.

Recommendations for Practice and Future Research

The conclusions drawn in this study have led to the following recommendations for practice and future research.

Recommendations for Practice

1. Conclusion 1 identified the prevalence of funding as a concern for superintendents. It is recommended that the College of Alberta School Superintendents provide the necessary professional development to inform CEOs of the pervasiveness of funding and financial problems, as well as practical examples of superintendents' effective responses.
2. Conclusion 8 identified the issue of role ambiguity and dual reporting tension. It is recommended that a province-wide initiative be implemented to provide the necessary professional development to clarify the roles and responsibilities of superintendents and trustees. John described an ASBA initiative currently piloted by Dr. Leroy Sloan to provide this training. Dr. Sloan presented an overview of the training at the June CASS meeting. This program should be expanded into a mandatory province wide program.
3. Based on conclusion 8, it is recommended that trustees' roles continue to be delineated and clarified to avoid tensions with school superintendents. Participants were comfortable with their role of advising the board but were extremely uncomfortable with trustee involvement in administrative affairs.
4. It is recommended that graduate studies in educational administration continue to provide instruction in the following areas, as identified in conclusions 1 and 2: educational reform, financial management, managing multi-million dollar budgets, policy design and implementation.
5. Based on conclusions 7, 8 and 9, it is recommended that professional development for the College of Alberta School Superintendents, Alberta Learning, and the Alberta

School Boards' Association occur regularly to clarify the roles and responsibilities of school superintendents and school trustees.

Recommendations for Future Research

6. Based on conclusions 3 and 4, it would be worthwhile to explore the experiences of other superintendents from different jurisdictions throughout the province to elicit different contextual experiences. Further research on more rural and suburban jurisdictions may add to the richness of the interpretative data presented.
7. Further research into the relationship between educational reform and the inherent politics of the government decision-making process is recommended.
8. This study has focused on the superintendent. It is advised that another administrative perspective be sought, e.g., that of the associate superintendent or school principal. Moreover, one could also study the perceptions of the senior government officials who experienced the reforms.
9. This study determined the problems associated with earmarked funding; therefore, an in-depth study to determine the effects of AISI grants would be informative.

Contribution to Theory

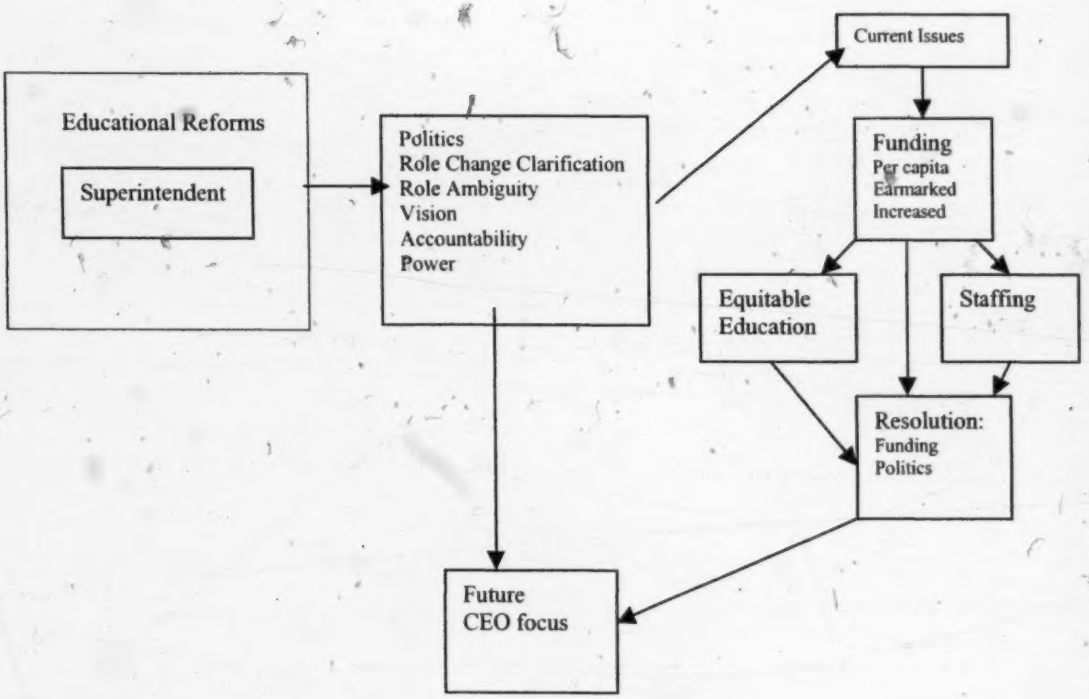
This study's contribution to theory is the expansion of the conceptual framework derived from the literature review. The tenth conclusion recommended modifications be made to the conceptual framework proposed in the conclusion of Chapter Two. An expanded conceptual framework, depicted in Figure 7.1 (p. 186) derived from conclusion 10 and was incorporated as emergent theory. The role of the Alberta school superintendent has been affected by educational reforms. These changes emerged as themes from the research data and serve as contributions to theory. Specifically, the

superintendency experienced role changes in the areas of politics, role change clarification, role ambiguity, vision, accountability and power. (Figure 7.1). Conflict management was not a priority issue for the participants as proposed in the original conceptual framework. These changes to the role of the superintendency contribute to classical role and organizational theory as well.

Increased demands from educational stakeholders and a changed understanding of the power of the superintendency emerged from the era of educational reform. As depicted in Figure 7.1 contemporary issues involving funding, equitable education, and staffing surfaced as important new challenges in the research findings. The future of the superintendency was perceived as evolving more towards a corporate focus rather than towards instructional leadership, which may contribute to educational change theory.

Figure 7.1

Expanded Conceptual Framework: Issues and Resolutions for Alberta School Superintendents



Reflections

Prior to engaging in this study, I had had very limited contact with school superintendents. The research indicated that CEOs were extremely busy and engaged in a myriad of daily activities. The participants were most gracious and patient with their time during the interviewing, site visits, follow-up member checks, and email transcript verification. The executive director of the College of Alberta School Superintendents welcomed me to attend numerous meetings, which ultimately informed my research. I was especially impressed with all of the participants' willingness to participate in site visits, which required setting aside extra time out of already hectic schedules. These visits gave my research a depth that would have been unattainable through mere interviews. I travelled to each district by car and by airplane. The numerous meetings with a diversity of stakeholders and senior administrators were most informative. I was struck by the vastness of the rural jurisdictions. In one instance, I traveled with a participant over 500 kilometers in one day to visit only two school sites. This experience gave me new insight into the term "windshield time" used by several participants.

I was impressed with the participants' ability to complete their daily tasks and maintain a balance despite their very busy schedules. The importance of relationship-building was evident in the superintendents' ability to manage the numerous relationships associated with the position. Despite the inherent obstacles and the realities of diminished funding, the participants remained remarkably positive and proud of their positions. For all the learning and insights gleaned on this journey, I am truly thankful.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What are the contemporary concerns for school superintendents of rural jurisdictions?

    - For each issue, what has been its genesis?
    - What strategies have been effective in managing these ongoing concerns?
    - Who was involved?
    - What are the likely future scenarios?

2. Describe the political role, if any, that superintendents have with educational stakeholders.

3. What jurisdictional concerns, if any, have arisen since the educational reforms of the mid 1990's?

4. How have societal expectations affected the role of the superintendency?

5. Has the role of the superintendent been defined clearly enough so that all educational stakeholders have a sense of the CEOs responsibilities?

6. What are your current professional development concerns as a superintendent?

7. What concerns, if any, do you have about current superintendent evaluations?

8. What is your concept of power?

9. What is the future of the superintendency?

Appendix B

Contact Letter

Participant Contact Letter

Dear Superintendent,

During the 2000-2001 year, I have been enrolled in a doctoral program of administration and leadership at the University of Alberta. It is my intent to commence research associated with the superintendency. As with all research, those conducting it must seek participants to provide data. At the outset, I would like to ask you to be one of the participants in the study since the research revolves around the superintendent and the issues currently challenging modern chief executive officers.

The purpose of the study is to identify current issues challenging school superintendents. I am also interested in identifying resolution strategies that superintendents employ to address these issues. To acquire data relevant to these questions, I propose to use the interpretive research method, which will consist of semi structured interviews. The interviews will last approximately one hour and will be recorded to allow for transcription of the interview and subsequent analysis of data. With some of the participants, it will be necessary to conduct a second interview to seek clarification of issues, topics, views and behaviors that have emerged from data analysis of the first interview.

All research will be governed by the Ethics of Research as developed by the University of Alberta. In light of these ethics, participants are guaranteed confidentiality and any comments which are excerpted from the interview data for use in the dissertation will be attributed a pseudonym. You may decide at any time to opt out of the study despite your initial agreement to participate. A copy of the ethics review application and the signed approval are include in this package for you information.

The general timeline for the interviews is July 2001 and can be made at a time, which suits your busy work schedule. I am flexible to meet where ever is convenient for you. Should you determine, after examining and reflecting upon the transcribed data, that an incident which was described might be potentially damaging, you may exercise the right to have any reference to that data deleted from the data analysis and the reporting of the data. A signed guarantee of confidentiality will be provided to you. An executive summary of the final dissertation will be provided if so requested.

I have taken the liberty of including two copies of a letter of intent to participate in this package for your signature. It would be greatly appreciated if you would return it to me by date along with a tentative time when you feel we could meet for the initial interview. Please retain one copy for your own records. If you require any further information to assist you in making a decision please do not hesitate to contact me at 432-0337 or by email at wallacem@ualberta.ca

It is my sincere hope that you will assist me in conducting my study. Your help is most certainly appreciated. I look forward to meeting with you in the near future.

Regards,

Wallace MacAskill
Ph D Provisional Candidate
Educational Policy Studies
University of Alberta

Please sign below and return this letter if you are willing to participate in this study.

Name: _____

Convenient date for an interview: _____

Appendix C

Consent to Participate

Letter of Intent to Participate in Doctoral Research

To: Wallace MacAskill
531 RH Michener Park
Edmonton, Alberta
T6H 4M5

Please be advised that I,_____ do hereby agree to participate in your Doctoral Research Study entitled, *Identification and Resolution of Issues Challenging Alberta School Superintendents*. This agreement is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

That the research is to be conducted as per the Ethics of Research as developed by the University of Alberta as per the material found within the approved Ethics Review Application which has been included with your letter of request. Specifically, the following points are included in this approval:

- As a participant, I am guaranteed of confidentiality and any comments which are excerpted from the interview data for the use in the Dissertation will be attributed to a pseudonym known only to the researcher;

- I may, at any time, decide to opt out of the study despite my initial agreement to participate;

- Arrangements for interviews can be made to suit my schedule and commitments;

- Should I determine, after examination and reflection upon transcribed data, that an incident which has been described might be potentially damaging, I may exercise the right to have any reference to the data deleted from the data analysis and the reporting of the data;

- Approval is given subject to a signed guarantee of confidentiality noted at the bottom of this letter;

- An executive summary of the final dissertation will be provided to me in recognition of my assistance in this research study if so requested;

- The interviews will be tape recorded to facilitate transcription and data analysis;

- Copies of the transcribed data will be provide to me as soon after the conclusion of the first interview and if applicable, after the second interview.

Date:

Signed:

Appendix D

Guarantee of Confidentiality

Guarantee of Confidentiality

I, Wallace MacAskill, guarantee confidentiality to_____ with respect to interview data associated with a Doctoral Dissertation entitled Identification and Resolution of Issues Challenging Alberta school Superintendents and that no reference will be made to location or jurisdiction in the attribution of excerpted responses. It is further guaranteed that any comments excerpted from interviews will be assigned a pseudonym that the participant reserves the final right to approve the inclusion of excepted data from the Doctoral Dissertation.

Date:

Signed: